WHITE MAGIC

M. McD. BODKIN, Q.C.

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Facsimile of the scrap of paper which frightened the Bank clerk, and which is still preserved in the archives of the Bank of England.—p. 4.

WHITE MAGIC

A NOVEL

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"LORD EDWARD FITZGERALD," ETC.

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WHITE MAGIC

CHAPTER I

A CHEQUE FOR A MILLION

"When the King heard the sack was to be filled with gold he was greatly alarmed. 'My money will all be swallowed up,' he thought. However, he ordered a ton of gold to be brought, and it took sixteen strong men to carry it. But the strong man took it up easily with one hand and threw it into the sack. 'Fetch more,' he said, 'that only just covers the bottom.' So the King ordered more to be brought, which the strong man threw into his sack also. Yet still it was not half full. 'Bring more,' he cried, 'these crumbs are nothing at all.' So at last they brought seven hundred cartloads of gold from all parts of the kingdom, and these the strong man stuffed into his sack. 'I cannot stay much longer,' he said, 'so bring me all you can to fill my sack.'"—*Grimm's Fairy Tales.*

A DAPPER little old gentleman is walking down Fleet Street. There is nothing at first sight remarkable about him. A hundred similar little old gentlemen may be seen walking briskly to their offices in the City this fine October morning. His clothes,

black cloth as to the walking coat, dark tweed as to the trousers, are well brushed. His black cravat is primly tied, his umbrella neatly folded and tucked carefully under his arm. He steps along at the quick pace of twenty-one. But the springiness is gone out of him, and in his step there is a certain mechanical stiffness that age brings. His close-cut side whiskers are snow-white, so is his hair, the little there is of it on the clean bald head under the shiny hat. His complexion is fresh and clear, a lusty red like a wholesome winter apple. His firm mouth is full of sound white teeth. There is a curious school-boyish, out-of-place dimple on the russet cheek and resolute chin; but his steel-grey eyes are hard and clear and cold as icicles.

There is his photograph, in colours taken at a snap shot as he goes by.

But we must hurry up or he will escape us. There he goes now over the crowded crossing at St. Paul's, in quick jerks like a robin on a garden path, stepping neat and brisk as one of those new tin walking toys, down the narrow path that skirts the huge over-shadowing bulk of the Cathedral. Down Cheapside he goes, dodging in and out through the throng as only a Londoner can. The loitering vendors of penny notions have too much sense to offer their wares to him. At the Mansion House he turns to the left, and fifty paces on, again sharp to the left through the triple doors of the chief temple of Mammon in this money-loving world of ours.

It is a temple worthy of the God; a great square, solid, stolid building a single storey high, for Mammon loves the earth rather than the sky. There are no windows. His cult thrives best in the twilight. Even the very ground smacks of the worship of the Golden Calf. On the wide surface of the globe there is not another patch of ground so costly. Gold coins spread as close as they could lie could not purchase the three acres on which stands this squat mass of stone and mortar.

A tall beadle, dressed in cocked hat and robes that look like the cast clothes of a Lord Mayor, parades the court-yard between the outer and inner doors. Our little old gentleman turns to the right through a parallelogram of paved garden with rusty dusty evergreens round the walls, and a fountain, like an inverted glass dish, in the middle. These few square yards of dull pavement are worth more (as Mammon counts worth) than acres of the richest lands of pleasant England, beautiful with waving trees and melodious with running waters. The place was once a graveyard. The earth under the pavement is the mouldering dust of dead men who doubtless loved gold in their day, like the live men who now trample over them in pursuit of it.

But our little old gentleman has no time for moralizing as he again turns sharply, this time to the left, into a long room with gas-lights in the ceiling (though it is bright morning outside), and young men in compartments, scribbling busily

or staring blankly, behind the broad mahogany counter.

In a sharp, business-like way he steps up to the counter, lays his umbrella down beside him, takes off his dog-skin gloves, and shows a pair of small white hands wrinkled like carved ivory with curious brown stains on them. Dipping thumb and forefinger into his waistcoat pocket, he draws out the customary oblong slip of paper folded in three doubles, unfolds and presents it to the red-headed clerk who has been watching him with the patronizing condescension which bank clerks display to bank customers.

The clerk holds the corner of the paper with the thumb of his left hand and smooths it open with the fingers of his right. His lips are just framing the customary formula, "How will you have it, please?" when his eye lights on the figures of the cheque.

The words die away in a frightened gasp. His sallow face flushes red as his hair and then grows whiter than ever. For a full minute he stares open-mouthed at the imperturbable customer.

"This is a very large amount, sir," he managed to falter out at last.

He was right. It was a large amount, distinctly a large amount even in that establishment where gold is dealt in wholesale.

"Yes," said Mr. Merlyn quietly, "it is rather a biggish sum, but I have got two two-horse wagons waiting. I will take £999,950 in gold, if you please, and the remaining £50 in small silver."

He spoke as coolly as if he were asking for a pound of tea across the counter.

"Will you kindly take a seat for a moment, sir?" said the clerk, still stammering a little in his excitement, and Mr. Merlyn kindly took a seat.

The clerk hurried away to the inner sanctuary of the temple, where were men competent to deal without flinching with a cheque for a million.

In a moment or two the cashier came out, holding the cheque between his fingers. There was an affected, over-done look of unconcern on his face as if he wished it to be understood that cheques for a million were rather common than otherwise on the Bank of England.

"This is a somewhat large draft, Mr. Merlyn," he said courteously. "I presume you want the money at once?"

"Well, I am not in a great hurry as to an hour or so, but as soon as you conveniently can."

"Certainly, my dear sir, certainly; there won't be a moment's unnecessary delay, but, as you will understand, some little time is necessary. I will see to it immediately."

He slipped out without his hat, to the landing of a flight of stone steps that led down to a paved yard on which the vaults of the Bank opened. At the bottom step he stopped before a gate that filled the low-browed black archway. The vertical bars were of solid wrought steel, each as thick as a man's arm. Behind the bars was darkness like a wall. He turned an

electric button, and light was made. A score of dazzling lamps flashed out at once, gleaming on the piled-up masses of gold within. Surely the cave of Ali Baba was nothing to this. Here were twenty solid tons of the yellow metal that makes the world mad.

The cashier touched the button, and straightway there was darkness. For the first time in his official career he was nervous and excited. He rushed up the stone steps and plunged once more into the penetralia of the temple. This time there came out with him a pleasant-looking gentleman with a bald head and a grey beard. The light flashes up again in the golden cave, the key is fitted to the lock, and the ponderous door on which a cannon ball might have shattered itself in vain, turns easily on noiseless hinges.

"There is only £20,000 to be weighed," said he of the bald head, "the rest is ready for payment."

He seemed quite at home amongst the gold, and talked as lightly of £20,000 as the ordinary man talks of sixpence halfpenny. No wonder! Twenty thousand pounds became a mere trifle in that cave of colossal wealth. Gold was all round the room. On one side were low trucks piled with yellow bricks of solid metal with a little triangular morsel bitten out of each, where the assayer's tooth had tested it.

The story goes that an official once placed one of those bricks without warning in the hands of an unwary visitor. Instantly his muscles yielded to the

unexpected strain of that huge weight, the ponderous mass went down with a crash, and he had the honour of having his toes crushed by pure gold. Since then officials are more careful.

Round the other wall of the room are heaped stout canvas bags of gold coin. It is a place to make the casual visitor draw his breath hard with suppressed excitement, and send floating through the most prosaic minds vague visions of the boundless possibilities of such wealth. But to the bank officials custom had made the scene commonplace.

The grey-bearded man seated himself opposite a scale like a writing-desk, and planted his foot on a kind of pedal underneath it. On this wonderful scale mechanical ingenuity had exhausted itself. A stream of running water, a column of dancing mercury, and an ingenious adaptation of the principle of the pendulum, combined to produce a balance steady as the solid earth, sensitive as the tip of the snail's horn; a balance which recorded the gravity of a postage stamp or of a ton of solid metal with the same imperturbable impartiality.

One after another, twenty canvas bags, each crammed with a thousand sovereigns, were tested, and not found wanting.

The bags, with a great mass of others already weighed, were piled upon trucks by two stout assistants, and drawn to the entrance of the archway, when the great door closed behind them.

In the yard outside, almost filling it, waited two

huge wagons, each drawn by a brace of stolid Clydesdales, and driven by burly van men, scarce less stolid.

A hundred stout boxes of unplaned white wood, such as soap is packed in, were stacked beside the pile of plump canvas bags. Then all things were ready to open a vein in the plethoric old lady of Threadneedle Street, and let her yellow life-blood flow.

For a good hour Mr. Jacob Merlyn sat on the bench and waited impassive while commonplace customers came and went. There was not the faintest trace of impatience or excitement. It was not in his blood to be impatient or excited.

When the cashier, perturbed in spite of himself by the bigness of the business, called him at last with a curious little touch of mystery in his manner, Jacob Merlyn rose and followed him as coolly as if he were going out to his customary city luncheon of a chop and half-pint of port.

He stopped between the pile of boxes and the pile of bags.

"Weight all right?" he said to the cashier.

The cashier nodded.

Mr. Merlyn counted the bags, ticking them off with the point of his neat umbrella.

"All right," he said when he came to the thousand and last, "you can pack them."

Ten plump bags were crammed into one of the soap boxes. The man with a hammer in his hand prepared to drive the nails home.

Mr. Merlyn stopped him. "That will do," he said, "just lay the lid on. It will have to come off again presently."

The huge drivers lending the bank porters a hand, fifty ponderous boxes were presently piled up in either wagon, and the Clydesdales, with much clatter at starting of their iron shoes on the stone pavement, went lumbering with their precious load out of the yard.

"Shall I call a cab, Mr. Merlyn?" asked the cashier courteously.

"No, thank you, I'll walk."

"Good day."

"Good day."

He was out on the pavement, picking his way along, neat, trim, brisk, imperturbable as ever, with his keen cool eye on the big wagons lumbering back towards Cheapside.

Very commonplace wagons they looked. Their stacks of wooden boxes half covered with rough tarpaulin did not seem a sufficient load for a decent donkey. But the cable-like muscles on the haunches and shoulders of the great horses rolled and swelled as they pushed forward with mighty effort against their collars, for they dragged nearly eight tons of solid metal on wheels behind them.

One is apt to fancy that those things occur only in fairy tales, where the young prince who kills the dragon or cures the princess, commonly gets a couple of cart-loads of gold and silver and the nice young

lady herself for his pains. It is not easy to realize that every-day horses draw such loads in every-day wagons through the unconscious streets of London, when great banks interchange compliments in coin with the old lady of Threadneedle Street, who is mistress of them all.

But it is not often, even in London, that one man owns such merchandise as is now rounding the corner into Cheapside, with Mr. Merlyn's eye still on it. Talk of being worth one's weight in gold! Mr. Merlyn was ten stone. That golden load would weigh down one hundred and twenty-eight Mr. Merlyns, and every gold coin of the million, with its infinite possibilities of power, enjoyment, or benevolence, is his own.

This tale has no concern with the steps taken to restore the bank to its normal and healthy circulation after this sudden and dangerous depletion of its vital forces; what wires were worked, what financiers invoked.

Our story follows Mr. Merlyn up Cheapside, where he walks briskly as ever with his eye always on the lumbering vans that drift slowly on in the dense stream of traffic, shouldered and hustled by mere plebeian carts of vegetables or groceries, like millionaires incog. on Bank Holiday.

At one crossing, where the vans stick fast, Mr. Merlyn motions the foremost driver the right way by a quick wave of his umbrella. They have diverged now into New Oxford Street and thence

into Tottenham Court Road, for Mr. Merlyn wisely keeps always to the most frequented thoroughfares.

Out on Hampstead Road come the heavy vehicles lumbering on in the brisk stream of tramcar, 'bus, and hansom, like dead logs in running water. Mr. Merlyn, a little in front, beckons again, and turning sharp to the right after him they enter suddenly on a pleasant oasis in the heart of acrid, strident London.

In front is a crescent-shaped park, in which there are still green trees and green sward and bright autumnal flowers and shady walks, just sprinkled through the shade with golden sunshine.

The houses, which are the outer curve of the crescent, are all clean and bright, picked out with patches of gay creepers and flowers in the window-boxes. The place is quieter than a country village. There is no living creature in sight except a Persian cat, basking on a white stone door-step, and a nursery maid wheeling two children in a perambulator. Even she is just turning out on Hampstead Road as Mr. Merlyn turns in off it.

Near the centre of the curve he stops and the wagons stop with him. They are opposite the prettiest and best-kept house in the row, a house with steps as white as snow and windows clear as diamonds, and bright flowers covering the iron fretwork of the balcony on which, French fashion, the drawing-room windows open. It seems the very home of modest comfort.

Mr. Merlyn ran up the white steps and fitted a long double-headed latch-key to the door. But he did not enter.

"Dorothy," he called from the threshold.

A sweet girlish voice, clear as the first note of the thrush in the early spring, answered, "Yes, father; coming."

"Is Martha in?"

"Martha-a," the girl's voice sang out in that way that girls have—the second syllable four notes higher than the first.

The same instant there came up the kitchen stairs a tall, gaunt, bony woman settling a cap on her bald head as she came. She might have been called masculine but for her prim, womanly neatness and the soft, plaintiff look of the great brown eyes in that hard yellow face of hers.

"Martha," said her master, "kindly stand here for a moment or two," and Martha stood. She was a serviceable woman, not given to many words.

Mr. Merlyn ran down the kitchen stairs, but not to the kitchen. At the head of the passage that led to the kitchen he came to an iron door. He fitted to it the other end of his slim, double-headed latch-key. It opened as easily and noiselessly as a well-oiled piston-rod slides through its cylinder, and he entered what in ordinary houses would be called the coal-cellar. But there was surely no other coal-cellar like this in all London. The electric lights in the roof, which flashed up as he touched the ivory button,

showed a spacious vault, clean lined, walls, floor, and ceiling, with smooth white tiles, so polished that they made an attempt to reflect the objects in the room like incompetent mirrors.

The place had the appearance of a chemist's—if not of an alchemist's—laboratory. Books, bottles, and retorts were ranged round the walls on shelves. There were two furnaces with the flues opening into the main chimney of the house, and close to one was set a miniature forge. A big black pile in one corner was the sole reminder of the coal-cellar.

Mr. Merlyn planted a step-ladder under a round black hole in the white ceiling, and, mounting it, undid a ponderous steel bolt, and so let sling the heavy metal bull's-eye that filled the circular hole through which, in ordinary coal-cellars, the coal is hurled down from the side walk. He drew out from a corner of the cellar a thick piece of cocoa-nut matting and spread it doubled under the opening, put the step-ladder carefully back in its place, turned off the light, and passed through the door, which closed behind him with the clean, strong click of its huge lock.

In another moment he relieved Martha at the door-step.

"What's for dinner?" he said, as she turned to leave without a word.

"Sole, leg of mutton, roley-poley pudding."

"All right. See to them. Now, men" (this to the coal-heavers in the wagons), "work away."

At this the great loose-jointed giants woke up to

sudden energy. They slid down from their seats, the stolid horses standing stock-still. One man stood at the tail of the first wagon, the other well in on the pavement.

"Here, Bill, catch hold," cried the man at the wagon; "look out, it's heavy," and so the first of the wooden boxes, passing from hand to hand, was planted beside the opening.

Mr. Merlyn himself lifted one of the plump canvas bags in both his hands and dropped it through. It fell with a clear metallic chink on the cocoa-nut matting in the darkness below. The big-armed fellows followed his example with a will. Bag after bag went pelting down in a continuous shower into the darkness. For half-an-hour the chinking stream of gold poured incessant.

It was hot work while it lasted, and the men wiped their hot moist faces when it was done. On the pavement, or huddled back into the vans, were a beggarly account of empty boxes, and in the vault below there was a cone-shaped heap, of which the white point came within a foot or two of the opening in the pavement.

Very keenly Mr. Merlyn glanced at these boxes to make quite sure that no odd bag had been forgotten, accidentally or otherwise.

"All right, my men," he said at last, "you may go. You know what you have got to do—take these boxes back to the Bank, and your day's work is over and your day's wages due."

But they only shifted their huge feet on the pavement.

"Oh! I see. Well, it has been a troublesome job, and a little out of the common, so I don't mind if I do give you something for yourselves once in a way."

He took from his pocket an old-fashioned green silk purse, plump at the ends and lank in the middle, with a white gleam through the meshes at one side and a yellow at the other, fumbled for a minute with finger and thumb, and then put a sixpence into one of the huge hands stretched out to him.

"You can share it, you know; I have no smaller change."

One man grumbled out a curse. But the other laughed good-humouredly as they climbed back into their seats and vans, and the Clydesdales with lightened loads went lumbering back into the City.

Again Mr. Merlyn used his latch-key, and the door closed quietly on himself and his million.

CHAPTER II

THE MONEY-CHANGER

"That you should hatch gold in a furnace, Sir,
As they do eggs in Egypt."—BEN JONSON.

THIS time Mr. Merlyn called nobody, and his daughter, though she heard his footsteps in the passage, knew him too well to come without being called. For just a fraction of a second he listened to her clear fresh voice lilting "Rich and rare were the gems she wore." Mr. Merlyn loved sweet music, and loved his daughter too, after a fashion. But elsewhere was metal more attractive, and hanging his hat on the peg, and setting his umbrella in the stand, he went quietly down to join his gold in the cellar.

Let us have another look at his den as he enters it. It is a large room, not merely underlying the whole ground-floor of the house, but burrowing out under the garden. Plainly it is a room meant to be lived in; though not a glimpse of sunlight enters, yet, by what scientific device contrived, the air is kept brisk and pure. There are chairs and tables and a writing-desk, and cupboards standing against the wall.

Mr. Merlyn, like a careful City man entering his office, changes his coat to one of rough worn tweed, and sets to work at once on the pile of bags encumbering the centre of the room, stacking them systematically along one side of the wall.

It is a heavy and a long job, but he sticks to it steadily, and an hour and a half sees it completed.

Then a cupboard is opened, and he proceeds to refresh himself with biscuits and a large glass of brown rich sherry, whose surface ripples and dimples like oil as it is poured into the glass.

Mr. Merlyn munches and sips complacently with quiet enjoyment. It is his ordinary luncheon hour, and it is for the first time for twenty years he has missed his ordinary lunch. But this is no ordinary day with Mr. Merlyn. He was about to begin in earnest the great work of his life, which—but that is Mr. Merlyn's secret, not ours. A mild cigar follows, the light blue smoke melting at once into the brisk air and vanishing, as, with his eyes fixed meditatively on the neat stock of canvas bags, he placidly smokes to the last.

Thus far Mr. Merlyn's matter-of-fact manner has been in sharp contrast with his extraordinary surroundings. His next proceeding makes the puzzle more perplexing.

Rising briskly with the air of a man who has still work before him, he lights the furnace of charcoal and coke, and with a blacksmith's bellows worked by lever handle, blows it to a white heat. He sets on

the glowing coals a clay crucible that soon becomes fiery white as the fire itself, with curious little sparks coming and going on the inside like bubbles of flame.

His next proceeding is still more peculiar. From one of the little canvas sacks which has been set apart he takes a handful of small silver, from another half-a-dozen sovereigns. Carefully re-tieing the necks of the bags he brings the gold coins to where his anvil stands and proceeds to beat them out flat. Then with a tinman's scissors he snips them into tiny fragments, as a mischievous child snips paper.

There is a double handful of those precious morsels of metal, white and yellow, which he forthwith pours into the glowing crucible, drops in after them about the bulk of a bean of fine grey powder, and waits.

The every-day, commonplace look of the man is in startling contrast to his work, as he sits there patiently cooking his gold and silver with keen eyes on the precious boiling. After a bit the pile of metal in its turn grows translucent as it is subtly permeated by the fiery glow. Then the fragments on the top begin to nod and topple over. Presently a smooth, shiny fluid oozes up through the interstices, and the morsels of metal as it touches them turn to fluid themselves, till at last there is nothing in the crucible but a rich, thick, cream-coloured liquor, radiant with heat and light, and very beautiful to look at.

This was plainly what Mr. Merlyn has waited for.

With a long tongs he lifts the crucible from the hot heart of the fire, and empties its ardent contents, shrieking and hissing, into a shallow vessel of water. The water is poured off, and the fragments of molten and blended metal are sifted carefully into a Florence flask, buried to the waist in hot sea-sand.

Mr. Merlyn seems pleased. So far the experiment has gone without a hitch. Now from one of his shelves he takes down a large thick blue bottle with glass stopper. There is a hot whiff and a curl of white smoke as he opens it and pours the contents into the Florence flask until the metal in it is completely submerged. Instantly there starts a tumult, bubbling and hissing within the crystal walls, while the fierce fluid seems actually to devour the solid metal.

Replacing the stopper Mr. Merlyn watches the tumult intently. At this moment the deep, solemn note of a great gong is felt rather than heard in the room. In a moment he knocks off work—that is the only phrase to express the suddenness of it. Leaving metal and liquid to fight their battle out in their glass prison, he makes ready for dinner.

Toilet appliances are not wanting in this vault of all works. Five minutes later Mr. Merlyn resumes the coat of respectability and passes into the upper world, with his mysteries locked close behind him, as neat and prim, and, to the common eye, as commonplace a business man as ever sat at office desk in the City.

The abrupt little bird in the carved cuckoo clock

on the chimney-piece had flapped open his little trap-door, and uttered the first of his five shrill cries as Mr. Merlyn entered the parlour.

His daughter was there before him. She is not commonplace. It would be well indeed for this work-a-day world if Dorothy Merlyn were its commonplace. Hers is a face to make a home bright as she starts lightly from her place by the cheery fireside with welcoming word and smile and kiss for her father, who takes the loving salute of these sweet lips tolerantly, no more.

Who is mad enough to try to put a young girl's loveliness into mere words? Shakespeare has warned us from the attempt. We remember the fair Olivia's playful catalogue of her own charms—"Item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth." It was not merely pure colour and soft curves that made Dorothy Merlyn so lovely and so lovable. There is a beauty quite apart from its owner. There is a beauty that tells us nothing of its owner, a beauty that dazzles and repels. But Dorothy Merlyn was good to look at as well as beautiful. Her loveliness "gave delight and hurt not." It was part of her very self, and one loved her for it.

Even her father felt—always in moderation—the charm of her sunny smile and sweet voice. She was one of his luxuries. He liked her for his own sake, for the pleasure she gave him, just as he liked the pleasant room in which he sat, with its old china

ornaments and quaint coloured engravings; just as he liked the good dinner he ate, the rich wine he drank, the choice cigars he smoked. For Mr. Merlyn had educated tastes and senses, and indulged them. His was the true Epicurean motto, "the best of everything is good enough for me." He was not one of the old-fashioned misers who starved and pinched himself. If he had ten millions instead of one he could not have got more solid satisfaction out of his life. But his cold selfishness saved him from ostentation. He had no active vice, and only one passion.

The dinner was plain, but perfect in cooking and serving. Martha could no more make a mistake than a well-constructed machine. Mr. Merlyn dined wisely and well, and sat sipping his mellow old port with relish.

Dorothy watched him in silence. He was thinking of money. She was thinking of him. Their minds, hearts, and lives were a million miles apart, but her love spanned the gulf. To her he was not that hard, cold being, with scarce a touch of human sympathy, that God, himself, and the world knew. He was a father, loving and to be loved. She saw her own sweet nature reflected in him, not knowing that it was herself she saw.

"Dorothy," he said abruptly, "I shall not go to the office any more."

"Oh! I am so glad. You have been working too hard, and need a little rest."

"It is not that. I mean to work a little longer and a little harder, and I hope to some purpose."

"But why, father? why? You have all you want, you can go where you like, and do what you like. When you told me that all the little bags that were thrown into the cellar to-day were full of money, I thought it just like a fairy tale, and you were the good magician of the story. What is it you could not do with such wealth?"

"Only one million," said Mr. Merlyn dryly.

"A million! Ten hundred thousand pounds. You can never, never spend it, father. Surely that is enough."

"It is not enough, it is not near enough. I mean to go on working."

"To make more money?"

"To make more—gold."

The hard voice softened for the first time and seemed to caress the word gold. There was a smile on his thin lips—a smile of pleasure, a smile of triumph.

"There is nothing," he went on, "in the whole world to equal the clean, yellow metal; to touch it and have it and know its power. I never felt how rich I was until I saw that pile on my own floor. I knew it before, but I did not feel it. The touch of the metal thrilled through me. But it made me hungry for more. I mean to have more and more. There is nothing else worth working for or living for or dying for except gold."

Poor Dorothy made a desperate effort to share in his enthusiasm.

"Did you earn it yourself?" was all she could think of saying.

She could have thought of nothing to please him better.

"Every farthing myself," he answered complacently. "When I was twenty-one I promised myself that at fifty I should be worth a million of money. I'm not fifty yet, but the million is there. My own money in my own house." A curious eagerness came into the man's voice and eyes, a kind of suppressed white-hot passion that burned up the commonplace in him. "I will make it more and more," he said, "a hundred times more. I will be the richest man that ever lived on this earth. There is time enough yet if I work hard, and then——"

He broke off abruptly. He had forgotten his daughter, who was watching him with wide blue eyes and soft cheeks faintly flushed with the reflection of his excitement.

In a moment he was the city man again, cool, practical, commonplace.

"Is there no danger of robbers, sir?" said Dorothy, a little nervously.

He walked to the window and drew a corner of the blind aside.

"Come here," he said. She peeped out beside him, the curly golden head close to the bald white one. There were two policemen passing up and

down in the lamplit street. They could hear their heavy tread replete with security.

"The ratepayers pay those two big men for looking after my million," he said, smiling grimly. "They have heard of it, and they are here. My strong room is not as easily broken into as a lady's boudoir. Besides, I know a way to baulk thieves better than stone walls and iron doors and policemen. You may be quite easy, Dorothy. I'd sooner lose my life than my money, and I don't mean to lose either just yet. All that is not what I wanted to say to you. I want you to tell Martha that I will have lunch at half-past one every day for the future. I have never missed a week-day in my office for twenty-five years. I will never set foot in it again. That's all, otherwise we will go on very much as before."

By this time the pint of port was finished, and Mr. Merlyn took up the *Times*, which lay ready to his hand. For twenty years he had read the *Times* regularly for at least a full hour after dinner, beginning with the money article, going on to the foreign news, and winding up with politics. "Prospecting for gold," he called it.

This evening he just glanced at the paper and put it aside.

"There is an old saying," he muttered, more to himself than to his daughter, "I remember since I was a boy—'Lead us not into temptation.' I have given up that game for good. I said I would, and I will. I have never failed to keep my word to myself, and

I won't fail now. But it will come easier to keep out of the play if I don't look at the cards or the stakes. Have a game of chess, Dorothy?"

Dorothy leapt up at once from the book she was reading and got out the board, and set the carved chess-men in battle array. Mr. Merlyn's wishes had a way of making themselves obeyed like a law of nature. Sometimes Dorothy enjoyed chess, sometimes she did not. But she never objected. She would as soon think of objecting to the going down of the sun or the going out of the tide.

Mr. Merlyn played a wonderful game, patient and implacable. It was exercise, he said, as well as enjoyment. It kept his mental muscles in training. It was his life's work in miniature—calculation, combination, and capture from unwary opponents.

He had once played in public, an unknown man, pitted against a famous German champion. There were heavy bets and long odds, and Mr. Merlyn won. Mr. Merlyn had a way of winning whenever there was money in question.

Dorothy, trained by her father, was a brilliant player, quick-witted and daring. But she was no match for her tutor, who could make a pawn do the work of another player's queen, who never made an oversight and never granted an indulgence.

"What shall we play for?" said Mr. Merlyn.

"I don't—whatever you—half-a-crown," said Dorothy in three quick, broken fragments of sentences.

Mr. Merlyn did not care to play for love. He

could not play his best unless there was money, no matter what money or whose money, to be won by it.

"I will give you a queen," he said, and he picked the red queen from her square as he spoke. "You move."

So the game began. Dorothy intent, a pretty frown on her smooth white forehead, and her lips shut tight like a red rose-bud. Her father stolid as a clerk on his stool, only his keen grey eyes alive.

It was a typical struggle. If luck were possible in chess, one would say, Mr. Merlyn was the luckiest of players. His daughter's most brilliant attacks and combinations all turned to his advantage. Her pieces were delivered into his hands. Twice she exultingly cried "checkmate" in three moves, and twice his king found a single loop-hole of retreat from what looked like inevitable mate. Meanwhile he pursued his own game steady as fate and as merciless. He neither asked nor gave quarter. He made no blunder and overlooked no advantage. A miserable little pawn of his was pushed safely down through the embattled ranks as if it bore a charmed life, and was triumphantly crowned queen in the camp of the enemy. Dorothy executed brilliant charges and masterly retreats. Any one looking on for five or ten minutes only, would say she was incomparably the superior player, but his tenacity told in the end. She had just gathered all her forces for one irresistible attack, when an active red knight unexpectedly

leaped in skew-ways and mated her king in the very centre of her forces.

"Mate," said her father, and from his mate once spoken there was no escape.

At this she rumpled the glittering curls in which her hands were thrust to the wrists, and patted the ground impatiently with her little foot, for the sweetest temper in the world cannot stand a sudden defeat at chess.

"Oh! how unfortunate!" she cried petulantly. "If I had only just one move more, I must have won."

Then in an instant she laughed out merrily, remembering how often she had thought just the same thing, and how invariably her chance came just one move too late. So indeed it always chanced with those who played at games of luck or skill with Jacob Merlyn. The game was but a type of his life. In the mimic battle with his own daughter for a couple of half-crowns, were shown the same indomitable force of brain and will which had wrung a solid million of money from the grasp of cunning and greedy competitors.

He picked up the half-crowns coolly, as he had picked up much bigger winnings in his time, while she set about rearranging the men with that indomitable hope that no reverse can kill in the heart of the genuine chess player.

Let us leave them to their game in the cosy room and take the chance, while it is offered, to get well abreast with the story. Thenceforward we go straight on to the end without once looking back.

CHAPTER III

FATHER AND SON

"A student at his book so placed
That wealth he might have won,
From book to wife did flit in haste,
From wealth to woe to run.
Now who had played a feater cast
Since juggling first begun;
In knitting of himself so fast
Himself he had undone."

SIR THOMAS MORE.

JACOB MERLYN had never known pause, much less turn back on the straight, smooth road to wealth. He got money, first as a successful solicitor, then as a successful stockbroker. His advance, always steady, grew rapid when he abandoned all other clients for himself. He bought and sold on 'Change with an unerring judgment that was like instinct. Whatever he bought went up, whatever he sold went down. People said it was luck, but there was no touch of luck about it. He had eliminated the element of chance from his speculations. He had studied the money market and the men in it till he knew every piece and every move in the great game.

In the language of the ring, he made his book to win —now little, now much, but always something. How he did it he could hardly have told himself. How does the skilful and experienced physician by ten thousand trivial signs tell health from disease? In the same fashion and with the same certainty Jacob Merlyn diagnosed a security. He could always prophesy because he always knew. The prophecy of the stockjobber is profitable; so his money grew and grew with every "turn over," like a rolled snowball, till it swelled to an enormous fortune.

Mr. Merlyn employed no costly appliances in the making of his money. He was his own clerk, as he was his own client, and kept his own secrets. A tape telegraph and a telephone were the familiars of this nineteenth-century magician, whispering mysteriously of money to be made in every corner of the globe. It was an alchemist's laboratory was that dingy little office. The methodical little gentleman who came every morning at ten and left at half-past four had discovered "the Great Secret." But it was not blocks of dull wood nor lumps of gross metal, but skill and cunning that he changed to solid gold. He coined his own brain daily.

Yet he was not satisfied. "Increase of appetite had grown with what it fed upon." Quick as the money came it did not come quick enough. A fierce longing for illimitable wealth fevered his blood. This hard, dry, drudging city man saw visions and dreamed dreams. There is no rock so

hard, there is no soil so dry that some green thing won't grow there. There is no soul so arid, so close-cased in selfishness and common-sense (they often mean the same thing), that imagination will not contrive to strike root and spread leaf in some corner of it.

Mr. Merlyn did not believe in God, but he did most devoutly believe in transmutation of metals. Perhaps it is not quite right to say he did not believe in God. It is too strong an expression. He neither believed nor disbelieved. He neither knew nor cared. The subject had no interest for him. He was not the least curious to know how he had been made himself, but he was intensely curious to know how gold could be made. All the wild fancies of the alchemist's were in the room of a religion to him. He knew their works as well as he knew the Stock Exchange list, and that is saying a great deal. Aye, and he practised his religion devoutly. The laboratory which we have already visited in Sunbury Crescent was its temple. He was convinced that he was on the right track of the great secret which had eluded his predecessors. He had a new theory. They should have tried back, he thought. Once resolve gold into its constituent elements, convert it into some common substance, wood, iron, coal, earth, no matter what; then to reverse the process would be easy.

Meanwhile Mr. Merlyn made gold hand over hand by the commonplace methods, and was remarkable only for the skill and rapidity of the manufacture.

At twenty-three he married a bright, gentle little day-governess, whom he encountered in his comings and goings in the omnibus. She was an orphan, quite alone in the world. Why he married her who can say? She had not a penny in the world except her scant wages. She had no means or power to help him in his great money hunt. He married her for her lovely face, her comely figure, her gentle voice.

He wanted her, and he took her. For Mr. Merlyn never sacrificed his desires to money, knowing that he could have money at a cheaper rate. It was what the world calls a love match.

And the woman? She loved him with her whole woman's heart, believed with her whole woman's faith in his love. What else, she thought, but love would move him to marry her, who had nothing and was nothing? How could she know that she was to him but an instrument of his pleasure? "He loved not her but his delight in her." Her thoughts were not his thoughts, nor her life his. They had neither taste, sympathy, nor affection in common. Gradually and with many tears the truth was forced on her. Then the wife merged into the mother, the golden treasures of her heart were transferred from her husband to his son, and that devoted love that might have helped a stronger than herself, spoiled a weaker. The beautiful baby grew to be a handsome stripling, fair and strong of body, but in mind weak and wayward, with the thoughtlessness of youth and the selfishness. She laid down her very life under

his feet in her devotion, and he walked over her unheeding.

From his father he was as much aloof as if they lived in different worlds. Mr. Merlyn had no liking for animals—nor children. He always classed them in his mind together. Their unreasoning gambols irritated him. The pretty ways of his own first-born, and for a long time only born, had no attraction for his father. The mother, feeling this with a mother's hurt pride, kept the baby out of his way. The shy, handsome, sensitive boy, feeling it in his turn, kept clear of his father during his brief vacations, and clung to his mother. As he grew to manhood there was no strong tie to bind him to his home. But he condescended to accept his mother's love, and she was happy. Of his father, the son had no other or higher conception than the banker who paid his allowance; that allowance, it is fair to Mr. Merlyn to say, at school or college, was always liberal.

Merlyn junior scrambled through the University somehow, and came out of the scramble with his degree. Then he "studied for the Bar," that is to say, he ate dinners at Gray's Inn, when he had nowhere better to dine, and got a friend to answer his name at the law lectures. Meanwhile he carried on a desultory flirtation with literature, and had several amatory poems and short stories politely rejected by the magazines. He even advanced as far as a cynical three-act comedy, which a manager

promised to favourably consider, and didn't. So he fluttered like a butterfly through the theatres, and got his wings singed in due course.

His mother saw him but rarely those days, and when she did see him, he for the most part was limp and listless. Whispers reached her vaguely as though the birds carried them, which fluttered her mother's heart with anxiety. To do him justice, Richard Merlyn made no attempt to deceive her. He made no pretence to her of steadiness or study. He did not think it worth while. He put her anxieties by with a gentle, careless contempt that was worse than violence.

The father all this time went his own way unheedingly, and seemed to hear nothing, see nothing, and care nothing about his son's mode of life, satisfied that he had set him upon the rails and that he would arrive in time.

The end came suddenly at about half-past two of the clock one bright midsummer's afternoon.

Mr. Merlyn, busy in his office, heard footsteps on the stairs. The man's ears, like his eyes, were preternaturally sharp, and in an instant he knew those steps had never been on his stairs before. The light pat of a woman's foot was unmistakable. They paused at the door, and there was a faint murmur of voices and a hint of a nervous giggle, then a knock.

"Come in," said Mr. Merlyn, and his son for the first time entered that room. He led by the hand

a girl, very pretty, very young, with very sharp bright eyes and very golden hair. Her figure and complexion were "excellent and well if God did all," and her costume was the extreme height of the fashion. It just reached the point where the "mode" begins to merge into the *demi-monde*. There was a fixed simper on the red lips showing a glimpse of sharp white teeth.

Mr. Merlyn sat gazing at the face in silence, and the pair stood silently gazing back at him. He had had the telephone tube in his hand when they came in, directing the sale of £10,000 worth of foreign stock at a £200 profit. He put it down quietly. "It is just as well," he muttered to himself, "they will go up higher."

(When he gave his order after the interview, he found he had cleared £100 by the delay; next day the stock tumbled.)

There was one long minute's dead silence in the room, but Mr. Merlyn did not seem in the least put out at this singular visitation. There he sat looking at them silently with an expectant look in the keen grey eyes, as though it was an ordinary visit from an ordinary clerk to whom he wished to tell his business and go.

The pair, hand in hand, at the door grew curiously uncomfortable under the quiet, steady look. They wished to make a sensation, and they had not made it in the very least. The handsome young man felt that the frock coat and delicate French grey trousers

were a misfit. The lavender gloves were abominably tight, the blue tie and high collar almost choked him. He could not keep his hands quiet, and he could not keep steady on his feet.

The young lady did not blush. Her blushes were artistic and permanent. But the uneasy smile died out of her face and her underlip hung a little.

"Well," said Mr. Merlyn, after that long minute's pause.

"We have come to ask your blessing, sir, on the happiest day of our lives."

The sentence tumbled out of the young man's mouth in jerks, like liquor from a full bottle. This was what he meant to say, but not at all the way he meant to say it. They had discussed whether at this stage they should fall on their knees, but had decided they should take the blessing standing. So they stood.

"Yes," said Mr. Merlyn, senior, "anything else?"

His son grew desperate under the cool stare.

"This young lady, sir," he said, "has done me the honour to become my wife. It is not for me to speak her praises. I trust on closer acquaintance you will learn to appreciate her worth and love her as I do, or very nearly. She has heard of you from me. She is yearning to be a daughter to you—to comfort your declining years." (There was scant sign of weakness of age in that alert listener.) "She has already made her mark in the world of art. But she is willing to renounce the fascinating triumphs of her brilliant

career for the calm of domestic life sweetened by domestic affection. The name of Miss Cutie Killingworth may have——"

"Of the Oriental Music-Hall," interposed his father serenely.

It was not a very respectable music-hall. But its shares were booming, and Mr. Merlyn had bought in on the brink of the boom, and he knew the name of every young lady on its boards.

The young man was a little non-plussed by this sudden check in the flow of his eloquence. But he recovered himself.

"Miss Cutie Killingworth, late of the Oriental Theatre of Varieties. Now Mrs. Richard Merlyn."

"Of where?" asked his father sharply.

It was an inconvenient question. Young Mr. Merlyn thought it best not to notice it.

"We have come straight from the church," he said, "for your consent and blessing on our nuptials."

"It is hardly worth asking my consent, is it, when the business is quite over? But my blessing you are quite welcome to. Is there anything else?"

The question was equivalent to dismissal. His son was horribly non-plussed. He had been prepared for anger; but not for this deadly coolness and unconcern. Mr. Merlyn treated the whole business as an item of everyday news that was no special concern of his.

The young man's hands and feet had grown quite

cold, and the chill was stealing up the small of his back. There was a tremor in his voice when he began again.

"We are quite aware, sir, that we are dependent on your kindness and bounty. My wife has renounced the stage and its inadequate remuneration." (The young lady had been dismissed a fortnight before for boxing the stage-manager's ears in a fit of temper.) "In a few years I hope, by the honourable exercise of my profession, to—but at present we——"

He broke down completely under the unmoved stare of his father's keen eye.

"In plain language, you expect that I should support not merely yourself, but this—lady, whom you are good enough to present to me as a daughter-in-law."

There was a cold-blooded insult in the pause with which the word "lady" was brought out that cut the young man like a whip-lash.

"I never meant——" he began, when suddenly the young lady, whose assurance had all come back to her, briskly took up the running.

"Oh! stow that rot," she said with charming frankness; "of course you meant it. The old gentleman is quite right. We expect he will come down handsome for his only son, and his only son's wedded wife. He mayn't like the match too well, I dare say, but he'll find I'm not a bad sort if I am taken the right way. Anyhow, the thing is done and cannot be helped; so he will see he has got to make the best of

it. A couple of thou. per ann. will keep us cosy, and he won't miss them, by all accounts."

Mr. Merlyn turned sharply on her as she began to speak. There was something in her sharp, incisive tones, clear and hard as the ring of steel against steel, to catch and hold attention in spite of the commonplace vulgarity of her words.

"A hard woman—a sharp woman—a woman with a will of her own, and the courage of the devil," was Mr. Merlyn's silent comment. But his face made no sign. Imperturbable as ever he turned again to his son.

"You wish to know," he said, "what are my intentions in regard to your future?"

The son nodded. Something in the tone frightened him, though the old man's voice was very calm. He did not trust himself to speak.

"Well, I have none."

"Do I understand, sir, that you intend to limit me to the allowance I have heretofore enjoyed as a single man?"

"No, I do not."

The son drew a deep breath of relief.

"I intend to stop your allowance from this day."

Taking no notice of the young man's sudden paleness or the young woman's angry eyes, Mr. Merlyn went on quite calmly—

"What plans I made for you it is not worth while to mention, much less to discuss, since they are all over. You have taken your own course—so be it.

But I am done with you You are no longer interesting to me."

Without a word the son turned disconsolately towards the door. The girl held her ground defiantly.

"Stop!" cried the father, "hear me out. I make no pretence of paternal affection, or that kind of thing. I recognize no claim, not the slightest. You are twenty-one, and ought to be able to look after yourself. But I don't want you in London, and I can claim no right to send you out of it. Well, I will arrange to have five hundred pounds handed over to you when you call for it in New York. I will purchase tickets for you and this young lady, your wife, on the White Star Line; and I will give you twenty-five pounds down for preliminary expenses."

His son stood there silent, stunned; the woman spoke—

"Make it a thousand, governor, ready-money down, and we'll cry 'done,' though it's not what a son and heir, not to speak of his bride, has a right to expect."

Again Mr. Merlyn looked at her, but did not speak to her.

"I never change my mind nor break my word," he said to his son. "You ought to know that. Your absence is worth so much to me, and I give no more. I should think you and your good lady would be glad to get clear of London."

"I believe you, my boy," broke in the young lady.

"Father," faltered the young man, "can nothing move you?"

"Nothing you are at all likely to discover. I don't press my offer on you, observe; but I do insist on an immediate answer. My time is valuable."

"Take him up, Dick," whispered the young lady. "D—n him, he's as hard as nails. It's that or nothing. Take him up, I tell you."

The young man turned from her with a look of anger, almost of disgust. His face was still pale, his lips tight drawn, just parted over his white teeth. He had the look of a wild beast trapped.

"I take your offer," he said, "because I must. I make no pretence of gratitude or affection. I take it on your own terms. When must we start?"

"In a week. That will give you plenty of time. What's your address?"

"The Metropole. We intended starting for Paris to-morrow, when—I—that is to say——"

"Oh! I understand. Well, I will pay for the longer trip to America instead. There is nothing more at present, I think. Good-day."

He turned round in his chair and resumed his work. His son looked at him in silence. The woman cried, "Ta, ta, dad. Thanks for the tin. You're too awfully good; but we will pay you back some day, perhaps."

She might as well have spoken to the back of the chair for any sign Mr. Merlyn made. They got out to the street somehow—he silent and moody, she recklessly jubilant.

"I knew that dog wouldn't fight, Dick," she cried, "and I said so. From what I heard of the old boy I

guessed he was not partial to gush, and it wasn't in our line either. But you would try it on. We must wait until he is under the sod. He cannot take his money with him where he is going; it would melt if he did. It is not half a bad notion to put the Atlantic between us and our creditors. We'll have a high old time amongst the Yanks. There is a nice bit of spending in five hundred. Something is bound to turn up before it is all paid out. Cheer up, old boy; don't be down on your luck. Let's have a hansom to the Metropole, and a bit of lunch, and a taste of 'fiz.' I could do a lump of thick and a toothful of moist like winking."

He yielded to the power of intense vitality that had captured him from the first. The hansom was chartered, and he handed her in. But as she leaned back in her place there came a harsh, cruel look in the bright eyes, and a tightening of the thin lips. "Curse them both," she muttered under her breath; "was it for this I sold myself?"

Just a week later Mr. Merlyn, himself unseen, saw them on board the *Magnificent* at Liverpool, and returned to London by the next train. That evening, after dinner, he said to his wife—

"Richard left for New York to-day. He has married a ballet girl from a low music-hall, and takes her with him."

The poor woman turned red and pale, and drew her breath hard. But his perfect coolness chilled and steadied her. Anything like a scene in Mr. Merlyn's

presence was as impossible as a fire in an ice-house. She gripped her chair lest she should fall, while Mr. Merlyn quietly sipped his port.

"Jacob," she said timidly, after a pause, "this is very sudden. It is terrible he should go without even bidding me good-bye. I am not very strong; I may never see him again."

"I think that's very likely," said Mr. Merlyn.

So it proved. Mrs. Merlyn was not a woman to make a fuss about her sorrows. Her grief "struck in," as the doctors say, and preyed on her life, instead of harmlessly evaporating in words or tears. She got a habit of sitting in the forenoon with her little golden-haired daughter in her lap, her patient eyes misty with tears, and her thoughts away with her first-born, her beautiful boy, her paragon, seeking him vainly, and finding him not; alone, friendless and helpless in the New World.

The little girl was strangely still at those times, and read in her big-lettered book of fairies and giants and beautiful princes, only now and again stroking and kissing the thin hand that half unconsciously smoothed her golden hair.

The little imp could be merry enough, and mischievous more than enough, when she was alone with Martha, who called her her precious plague, and loved her with the love of a lonely heart.

So the poor mother wept the blood from her veins, the life from her heart for her lost child. She made no complaint, and Mr. Merlyn took no heed, always

attending to his business with most exemplary punctuality.

One afternoon little Dorothy rushed down breathless, with her big eyes wide open, to Martha.

"Come, come," she said; "mammy is so white and cold, and she won't speak, and her hands hang so like dolly's."

Martha hurried after those quick pattering feet into the drawing-room. It was all over. Death had come as a comforter.

The doctor found it failure of the heart's action. Mr. Merlyn made no parade of grief. His customary grave and sedate manner suited the part of chief mourner without any particular "make up" for the character. He wore a black cloth band on his hat till he got a new one. Martha put the little girl into mourning; and the black set off her golden hair and dazzling complexion, so that people turned round to wonder at and pity her.

Martha was of Mr. Merlyn's discovery. Their servant had been detected by him in the theft of a spoon one morning, and dismissed summarily without notice or character.

He found Martha at a registry office on his way to business. On inquiry she told him she was a good cook and rigidly punctual. She had no "character" or reference. The name she gave was not her own. He engaged her on the spot. The event justified him. She was, in the emphatic language of the young housekeeper (while the

broom is still new), "a perfect treasure." When Mrs. Merlyn's health failed, Martha stepped quietly into the place of housekeeper. When Mrs. Merlyn died, she took entire charge of house and daughter. But her wages were not changed. At first she had been cold and hard, doing her work mechanically with mechanical perfection. By slow degrees she softened to Dolly—only to Dolly. The winsome little lady found her way to the woman's heart in her, as a bright little bird builds its nest in the hollow of a withered tree, and fills it with light and warmth and restless flutterings. Martha played with her, petted her, spoiled her as a pretty child. As a girl she loved and watched over her, patient, silent, and untiring as a great gaunt dog, grim to all the world, but to her most gentle. When a few months ago Dorothy came home from school "for good," Martha grew strangely shy of her beautiful young mistress, and only fondled her on compulsion.

* * * * *

"Check," cried Dolly's clear tone with a touch of triumph in it.

"Mate," responded Mr. Merlyn coolly.

It was a miserable little pawn that did it this time. A sneaking little pawn pushed one square forward at the same moment covered the king to whom his allegiance was due from the deadly assault of Dorothy's queen, and exposed Dolly's king to inevitable disaster. She pressed her hands to her cheek, dimpled and flushed with excitement, and

peered at the board for some avenue of escape. There was none. There never was from Mr. Merlyn's "mate." The small hands rattled the pieces a bit hastily into their box.

"I shall never beat you, father," she said with a rosy pout that would have tempted any one but a father.

"You play a good game," he responded, as he kissed her good-night, just touching her forehead with his lips. The abrupt little bird of the clock emphasized the good-night with ten shrill cries. Mr. Merlyn took his candle and Dorothy hers. The sun himself would as soon have thought of stopping up after his appointed hour as Mr. Merlyn.

So Mr. Merlyn went straight to bed, and his dutiful daughter straight to her bedroom. There was a bright fire in the cosy room and a cushioned chair drawn close to it, and a table with a reading lamp, and *The Newcombes* open and inviting (for Dorothy loved her Thackeray) at the famous railway journey of Ethel and Clive to Brighton, in which the love-making is so delicately insinuated.

As she cuddled herself up in the chair with that sigh of contentment which is equivalent to the cat's purr, Martha's bald head showed at the door, the cap gone, and the white skull like the egg of some extinct bird.

"Come in, you old conspirator," cried Dolly softly. "Oh! you know my weakness. What do you mean by tempting innocent youth in this way?"

The old woman stepped lightly across the room,

her gaunt wrinkled face all aglow with affection. She put her hand on the mat of tangled curls that showed golden against the crimson velvet of the chair.

"Comfortable, Miss Dolly?" she said.

"Very—thanks to you."

"And happy?"

"The happiest girl in the world. But what would father say if he knew?"

"Well, he don't know, and he won't know. You please yourself, my pet; whatever pleases you is sure to be right."

Dolly smiled her approval of this comfortable doctrine, while Martha stole from the room as noiselessly as she entered it.

As she passed Mr. Merlyn's door her face grew harsh again. "He doesn't deserve her," she muttered. "He cannot value her. He is as cold and hard as the gold he worships. Oh! my God, if I had a child like that instead of—" Her sentence was strangled in a sob.

Dolly settled herself to her book with the keener relish because her conscience, sensitive from little employment, told her it was wrong. Even to the very best, stolen fruit has a delicious flavour. She felt as she read on and on that she was living a bit of a novel herself. The stolen meeting of the young lovers and their delights in it thrilled her with vague sympathy. She closed the book. Her heart turned vaguely, as a young maid's will, to thoughts of love—

love impersonal, dreamy, mysterious, alluring, and she blushed all over at the mere thought of it. Then she put out the light and crept softly to bed.

Meanwhile Mr. Merlyn went straight to sleep. Mr. Merlyn kept his thoughts, like everything else belonging to him, in their place. He slept and woke with business punctuality, and he never dreamed—when he was asleep.

CHAPTER IV

DUST TO DUST

"If thou art rich, thou art poor;
For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
And Death unloads thee."—SHAKESPEARE.

THE two girls came out of the Lyceum beaming and chattering. They could not help it. They were young, they were pretty, they were well dressed, they had enjoyed themselves. Their gay young faces, their sweet young voices, were a delight to every male within eye or ear-shot. The bright spring sunshine was making the air warm, the sky clear, and the leaves green, and the birds lively, even in London. The spirit of the spring was in the young girls' blood. A year gone by had brought new beauty to Dorothy Merlyn. The curves of her slim figure were fuller, there was a softer light and shade in the deep violet eyes.

Her companion was a miniature Madonna: a fashionably-dressed Madonna. She had such soft, demure brown eyes, such long brown lashes, such a

sweet little mouth, and such a dainty little figure, that altogether she seemed a creature

> "Too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food."

"Oh, Dolly!" cried this Madonna, "wasn't he too lovely for anything, and so beautifully dressed, and lively, brave, and débonnaire, carrying all before him! That's the sort of man——"

"I'm ashamed of you, Jenny. He was a mean man, spending and borrowing, and marrying for money. He was so mean that he did not know he was mean. I wonder that Shakespeare ever let Portia marry him. She should have married Antonio."

"Antonio! that dull old thing in black, always in the dismal dumps. He'd be the death of her in a fortnight."

"He was a man, and Bassanio wasn't. I'd have given him to that little flirt Jessica, but not one penny of poor Shylock's money should he have."

"Poor Shylock, indeed! You will say poor devil next, Dorothy."

"He was a deal too good for that empty-headed, empty-hearted daughter of his."

"Is it Jessica? I'd sooner be Jessica than any one in the whole play. She was the best fun of them all. She made believe to be so meek and innocent to her father, while all the time she was getting ready to dress up like a boy and run away with her sweetheart."

"Well, her father was fond of her, at any rate; and she ran away from him and robbed him of his money, and stole her poor mother's turquoise ring and swopped it for a monkey. Would you do that, Jenny, or any nice girl?"

Jenny was silenced for a moment by this appeal *ad feminam*. But she broke out presently in a new place.

"But didn't she look lovely in her boy's dress, Dorothy? I'd love to be in boy's dress, and I know I'd look well in it. I tried on my new bicycle costume the other day in my own room with the door locked and the blinds down, and it was splendid. But I would not wear it in the street for the world. People would stare and laugh, and I'd get red all over. I must try and get used to it in my room first. It's like a bathing dress, only more proper. With stockings, you know, instead of bare—— But" (suddenly relapsing into Shakespeare) "that's not what I wanted to say. You must not be too hard on Jessica. How *could* she love such an old miser as Shylock?"

"Well, his money was his own; he didn't borrow or steal it, like Bassanio. He was fond of his old religion, and of his daughter too, till she deserted him. He was a brute to poor Antonio, I know. But Antonio had no right to kick him and spit at him, or abuse him. Antonio and Portia and Shylock were just the three nicest people in the play, and I'm sure Shakespeare thought so, only he never gives you the

least notion what he thinks about any one. I do wish these three were friends. I should not mind if Shylock wanted to cut a bit out of Bassanio. But it could not be near his heart, for he hadn't any."

"Bassanio," retorted Jenny, "was a fine gentleman, who was too proud to think of money."

"But he was not too proud to spend his friends' money and his wife's on himself. I'm quite sorry Shakespeare treated him so well, and was so down on poor Shylock."

"Oh, I know why you like Shylock! Because——"

The sentence did not finish itself. Miss Jenny Bligh turned abruptly to a shop-window, and fell in love at first sight with a "duck" of a bonnet. Her thought took another form when she began again, but it was the same thought still.

"Does your father ever go to the theatre, Dolly?"

"Never, Jenny. He never turns one hair's-breadth out of his way. One day with him is just the same as another. The hands of a clock don't go through the hours more monotonously. It would kill me, I know."

"And me," ejaculated Jenny with unction. "But when he came home for good, was there not some change?"

"Not a bit. The time he used to spend in the office he spends in the laboratory, that's all. Everything else goes on as it did before."

"I see. Just a new tune in an old organ; but the same old round of the handle. Oh, Dolly! I wish

you could stay with us for a bit. I have a high old time. Pappy brought me to the 'Empire' last week, and it was divine."

"Divine?"

"Well, the other thing if you like; but it was delicious. The next night we went to the Primrose League meeting. Right down under us were all the reporters taking notes, and I made up my mind that I would be a lady journalist. When I told papa going home in the hansom, he laughed. He always laughs at first. I have been studying shorthand out of a book since. I can work it beautifully, only I can't read what I write. But I don't suppose that matters so much."

"But what does your father say to this madcap notion?"

"Oh, he says 'Impossible,' 'Absurd,' 'Now don't be ridiculous, like a good child. General Bligh's daughter don't want money, and cannot afford to get talked about. Put this out of your silly little head, and I'll give you the price of a new bonnet.' That's how it always begins, but it ends in my having my own way —and the bonnet as well. You see the dear old guv loves me, not like——"

This time the halt was not quite quick enough. Dorothy caught her on the turn.

"Now, Jenny, I told you if you say that, you and I shall quarrel."

"What's 'that'?" asked Jenny, with a saucy sparkle in the brown eye and a wicked little dimple in the

baby-like cheek. "I didn't say 'that,' and I don't see any harm if I did."

"Oh, you know what I mean! He isn't demonstrative, it's true" (Jenny made a pert little *moue*), "but he is sincere. After all, it's for me he is working. He gets very little pleasure himself out of his money."

"He gets a great deal of pleasure *in* it, my dear," said Jenny sententiously.

"Now, Jenny, don't, for I won't stand it. He is always very good to me, and very loving," with a little gulp, swallowing the lie loyally, "and I love him."

"All right," said the good-natured Jenny; "there, I won't say a word or think a thought against him again. Good-bye now, dear, until to-morrow; this is my shortest way. The dad promised me a cigarette after dinner if I'm home before six, and it'll be a close shave as it is."

She was off like a flash down New Oxford Street, demure as a pet saint, with eyes modestly veiled with long lashes, but still highly conscious of the male homage as she passed.

"I do love him," said Dolly over and over again stoutly to herself, "and he loves me. I have been too frightened of him. I should coax and tease my way into his heart as Jenny does with her father. I wish I had her knack with him."

So her thoughts ran until she reached the corner of Sunbury Crescent.

She started with surprise to see Martha in front of her walking at a great pace. There was no mistaking the gaunt figure. Dorothy broke into a quick run, and caught up with her just on the door-step.

"I arrest you in the Queen's name," she cried merrily.

With a scared face and a short, frightened cry, Martha turned at the light touch on her shoulder. But she smiled at the bright face of her captor, who was flushed and panting from the run.

They entered the house together, and Martha, who appeared curiously excited, disappeared abruptly to the kitchen.

Dorothy put "her things" off, got her feet into dainty slippers, and buried herself in a cosy chair opposite a promising fire, black at the top but red at the heart, inviting the poker. She stirred it to a cheerful blaze, and tried to settle down to a good read before dinner. But somehow she could not for the life of her sit still that afternoon. A feeling of the dreariest loneliness was upon her. She walked impatiently to the window and drew the curtain aside. Loitering in front of the house was a great empty van. As she looked it lumbered round the corner and disappeared.

Over the way, in the pretty crescent-shaped garden, some children were playing merrily. Down the shadiest walk she caught a glimpse of two figures, a light coloured and a dark, walking very slowly and very close together. She dropped the blind with a

petulant little sigh, and got back again to her chair. So she sat for nearly an hour, her eyes half closed, and a pretty little pucker on the smooth white forehead. She was thinking hard how she might best melt the barrier of ice that shut her father's heart against her love. Jenny Bligh was so happy. If she could only——

She must have dozed at this point, for the sharp flap and cry of the little cuckoo clock striking five wakened her with a start. Her eyes went straight to the door. It did not open. One minute—two—three. For the first time in all her knowledge of him her father was late.

It was silly, she told herself, to be frightened at so small a thing, yet she was frightened.

The next moment there was a footstep in the passage and a hand on the door knob. Dorothy could not restrain a little cry of disappointment when she saw Martha come in.

One quick look round her told Martha that her master was not there. Her startled face startled Dorothy more and more.

Martha had grown suddenly pale, and her gaunt figure was trembling.

"It's nothing," said Dorothy, answering her frightened look. "It can be nothing. He has been so busy he forgot the time. The clock has gone wrong, or something. See, his hat and umbrella are in their places in the stand. He must be down-stairs. I'll call him."

She ran lightly down the stairs to the great iron door of the cellar, Martha following close at her heels. The door was locked. Dorothy beat on it eagerly with her open hand until the soft palm and fingers tingled with heat and pain. The sound seemed to be all thrown back; there was no stir within. The light from the kitchen showed down along the narrow passage, but the end where they stood was dark.

"I must get something heavy and hard to knock with," cried Dorothy impatiently, stepping past Martha towards the kitchen.

At the first step her foot struck something that slid tinkling along the pavement before her. She saw it glitter white and bright in the gleam that came from the kitchen door. She stooped and picked it up. It was her father's long, slim, double-headed key. One end she knew fitted the latch to the hall door and the other the lock of the door before her.

"It is the master's key," cried Martha, more frightened than ever, as Dorothy held it to the light.

Dorothy said nothing. She took a candle from the kitchen table and fitted the key to the lock. The huge, heavy door opened as easily and smoothly as flowing water to her touch, and she went in, Martha still following a pace or two behind.

The feeble light could make but a small breach in the black darkness.

"The electric, miss," said Martha, and turned the ivory handle as she spoke. Instantly the whole place

flashed out, dazzling, almost blinding them with the sudden glare of white floor and walls and ceiling. When they got their sight back they saw the place was quite empty.

They looked at each other with blank eyes.

"He may be somewhere about; he may have fallen asleep, or something," said Dorothy, trembling; "let us look."

She did not dare to put her fear in plain words. The two women searched all possible and impossible places, opening presses where a cat could hardly have found harborage. It is hard to say whether they were comforted or frightened by their failure.

They had now come together close to the stove. Dorothy still carried the lighted candle, shading it carefully with her hand, though the place was still as death and bright as day. Their faces were white and their black shadows shook on the white floor.

"When did you see him last, Martha?" asked Dorothy, in a shamed whisper.

"At lunch, miss," Martha replied in the same tone. "I made quite sure he was going back to his work as he always does."

"You did not see him come down, then? You did not hear him come down?"

"No, miss. I was called out suddenly and I had to go. It was a longish way towards the City. I only came back with yourself. But there is no need to be frightened, Miss Dolly," she went on in a brave effort to comfort the trembling girl, while she still trembled

herself. "There is no need to be frightened. The fine evening tempted him out maybe. Don't take on so, my darling, don't." All difference of degree was forgotten in an impulse of motherly tenderness. She caught the weeping girl in her arms.

"He'll be back presently," she whispered, "see if he don't."

"No, no," moaned Dorothy, "something awful has happened. Oh! Martha, something tells me he is here, here in this room."

She looked wildly all round, and Martha followed her glance with scared eyes, as if she dreaded his figure might suddenly emerge, ghost-like, from the white walls.

On one side of the vault there was a neatly-stacked pile of coke. On the other side a huge mound of dirty, blackish brown coal-dust. The tiling round the coke was swept clean. The coal-dust was in a rude heap, and the edges splashed over the white floor.

Some undefined impulse drew Dorothy to the spot. The surface of the pile had been disturbed. It bulged up in the centre, and there were the marks where it had been patted down smooth with a shovel. The shovel itself, a short, broad wooden one, lay close by on the floor.

Dorothy caught it up and attacked the pile vigorously, tossing the dust aside to right and left. But its weight was enormous. She made but little way, and her arms ached and her hands trembled. Then with one final effort she plunged the shovel straight down

to the shoulder in the yielding mass. It struck against something solid, consistent, quite different in feel from the yielding coal-dust. Dorothy felt the strange contact tingle up through her arms to her heart.

With a cry she drew out the shovel and flung it aside, and stooping, buried her hands and arms up to the elbow in its place, groping with eager fingers in the dust.

A second cry rang out wilder than the first, and she fell backward, all in a heap, limp as a corpse, on the floor. Martha ran to her and strove to raise her. Then she screamed out in her turn wildly, again and again.

Dorothy as she fell had made a great breach in the side of the mound, through which a limp arm and a white face, half covered with the foul dust, were dimly disclosed. The girl lay herself like dead, white face and golden hair in ghastly contrast to the black mound on which she lay, and her dead father's hand was clasped close in hers.

For a moment Martha thought she was really dead, so still she lay. All the cold ice of self-restraint melted from the old woman's heart in that moment as she flung herself down beside the girl she had nursed and loved, fondling her and weeping over her. But the instinct of self-control returned in a moment, as she felt the heart beat under her hand and a faint fluttering breath on her cheek.

There was a vessel of water close by with a metal

goblet beside it. As the first cold drops trickled on Dorothy's face and neck, she revived as suddenly as she had fallen. There was no confusion in her mind, no break in the sequence of thought. With one sharp pang the horrible truth came back to her. One moment she looked at the distorted face of her father, mouth and ears and nostrils clogged with the grimy dust, then with a little moan she turned and clung weeping to Martha's breast.

"He is dead, Martha. He has been murdered," she whispered through her sobs.

"Murdered, no doubt murdered for his money," Martha answered. "Come away, Miss Dolly, come with me, you can do no good here."

"No, no, no! I will not leave him in that hideous grave. You must help me, Martha."

Working with frenzied eagerness, now with the shovel, now with their hands, the two women cleaned away the foul dust that lay like lead on the body, and at last drew it clear of the mound.

It was a gruesome sight for a daughter's eyes. The white hair was torn and dishevelled and foul with the clinging grime. They wiped the poor face softly. The eyes were wide open, and the balls protruding. There were huge black veins corded on the forehead, the tongue hung out from the side of the mouth, the hands were open and the fingers distorted, as if the man had wildly clutched and strained for life. On the throat there were black marks and bruises that told their own tale.

Tenderly and reverently the women laid the body down on a couch, and Martha threw a white cloth over the hideously distorted face.

Dorothy raised the cloth for a moment and pressed her lips to the clammy forehead. To that moment she had been the calmer of the two, working steadily with white set face, and letting fall a whispered word of direction now and then. But at the ice cold touch of those dead lips, her composure suddenly gave way. She flung herself on the still body, and wept with passionate abandonment. It was her nature to love, and all the love of her heart had lavished itself upon him who had absorbed it, all unwarmed, as an iceberg the sunshine.

"Come away, Miss Dolly," whispered Martha again. "Come away, dear. Crying cannot help him now."

Dorothy yielded to the touch of her urgent hands, and let herself be helped to her room, where she lay far into the night with a vague dull sense of loss and loneliness, till merciful sleep came at last, and at his touch grief vanished for a time, to return again with sharp insistence at her waking.

The inquest was held in due course and the verdict given, "Murdered by some person or persons unknown." Inquiry got no further than this vague formula. Of the million of coined gold that had been stored in the vault, not so much as a single coin was found. The money had mysteriously vanished.

Martha's evidence showed she had been out from two to six. During that time the murder and robbery

must have been committed. It was thought that there had been at least two men engaged in it. But ten men could not in a few hours carry off seven or eight ton weight of gold.

The detectives, of course, had a "clue," and were vastly mysterious and self-important. But the clue led nowhere. For a while the Press and public were all agog with excitement. For a while the heading "The Mysterious Murder and the Missing Million" appeared morning and evening in the newspapers; but no new facts transpired to keep up the heading, and gradually the public curiosity died of sheer starvation.

Mr. Merlyn left no debts and very little money. No care seemed to have been taken for the future of his daughter. He had lived himself on an annuity of £500, which died with him. Twenty-five pounds in notes were found in his desk, and there was a hundred to his credit in the bank. The house in which he lived was his property in fee simple. Of his vast wealth no other trace remained. With this scanty provision Dorothy Merlyn at the age of sixteen must face the world, with no friend in the wide world but the grim old servant Martha, and the light-headed young madcap, Jenny Bligh.

CHAPTER V

A REAL OLD IRISH GENTLEMAN

"Though the Mansion House and duty acres have slipped through my fingers."—SHERIDAN, *The Rivals.*

ON the same day and almost at the same hour that the life was so rudely choked out of Jacob Merlyn, Festus Daly, J.P., D.L., lay dying in the best room of the beautiful Mansion House of Loughile, which had been in the possession of the family for generations.

"Come closer, Grace," the dying man whispered feebly; "I cannot see your face. My God! how dark it grows."

The young girl moved the two candles on the table closer to the bed, then she sat down on the side of it, and placed her hand in her father's, which closed upon it tightly.

The room was full of shadows from the curtains and the pillars of the bed, but the light fell clearly on her face and on his.

A very young and beautiful girl, but with a face quiet and grave beyond her years. Pale she was, but

not with a ghastly pallor. The rich, clear, cream-coloured skin and the firm curve of the cheek spoke of vigorous health. Her dark-brown hair was piled in heavy coils on her head, showing a wavy, rippling line where it edged the low forehead. But her eyes were the glory of her beauty. They were clear as the yellow topaz, and as bright. It seemed as if there were a flame kindled behind them: as if her soul shone through. There was a wistful earnestness in their gaze that startled by its intensity. Those shining eyes were now fixed unwaveringly on the wan face in the bed, watching every motion. The dying man patted the soft hand he held—oh! so feebly.

"It's my eyes that fail," he whispered, "and not the light. Your face is fading from me, Grace." Then, after a pause, and with a laboured indrawing of his breath between each word, "I am leaving you, my darling."

She answered not a word. Too well she knew he spoke the truth. But she motioned softly to one that stood in the shadow at the foot of the bed to draw near.

Her only brother Gerald came closer to her side, a brother to be proud of. Tall, strong, and manly, there was something resolute and cheery about the boy, in spite of the sorrow that dimmed the light of the quiet brown eyes, and made the resolute lips quiver.

"Gerald," whispered the feeble voice from the bed.

"I am here, father," he said huskily; "don't you know me?" Then a rising sob choked his voice, and the hot tears blinded him.

For answer the father took the strong young hand tenderly in his trembling clasp, then feebly groping for the young girl's, he found it again, and pressed the two together.

"Gerald," he murmured, his voice failing more and more, "you will be good to her. She has no one but you. She is not as other girls are, and will need your care. Times have been hard with us of late, and they are like to be harder with you. You are only a boy, but I know I can trust you. You will be a better brother than I have been a father. You will stand by your sister when I am——"

The voice trailed away into an inarticulate murmur; then silence. But the lips still moved.

Gerald leant close over the bed, but could catch no sound.

The girl watched her father's lips steadily, the strange light brightening in the depths of her clear, amber-coloured eyes.

"Yes, father, yes," she said, as if answering those moving lips. "You may be sure we will never part. We love each other too well for that."

The voice was a curious low monotone, like one clear note of a flute.

The dying man's lips moved again, and again the clear voice with its strange sweetness answered "Good-bye, good-bye." Then the eyelids drooped

a little, and the jaws fell apart. Death had come.

So Festus Daly passed away at the lowest ebb of his fortune. When his affairs were most hopelessly tangled, death cut the knot and set him free, leaving his son and daughter to struggle helplessly in the meshes of his making.

He was a real old Irish gentleman, all of the olden time. A fine estate had come to him from his father waterlogged with mortgages. He had piled more weight upon it till it sank. Money flowed from him like water. It streamed out between his fingers like a full hand of slippery canary seed. Reckless extravagance was in his blood from generations, till it had grown to second nature. He would infinitely sooner give a present than pay a debt. He was generous before he was just, or rather he was always generous and never just. The marvel was that he could pay so little and spend so much. Whatever was got on credit he regarded as clear gain. Payment was a thing not indeed to be denied, but to be indefinitely postponed. Yet he had such "a way with him," that he always succeeded in beguiling creditors in the first instance, and disarming them at the last. For ready-money he looked to the land, in the days when Irish land was a kind of Fortunatus' purse to the lucky proprietor, and grew gold for him when it failed to grow potatoes for the half-starved peasantry. When Festus Daly wanted money he passed the word to his agent, Mr. Ruthlin, who gave

another turn to the screw and squeezed it out of the luckless tenantry. Racers, hunters, carriages, a mountain in Scotland, a house in London, a trip to the Continent, an open hand and an open house, were to him bare necessaries of life. He must have money, and if it came he never asked how or whence it came. Like his prototype in the Bible, "he cared for none of these things." He forgot the existence of his tenants unless he chanced to meet them. He had a pleasant warm feeling about his heart that, in some way, he was their benefactor. He felt as he might feel after feeding a favourite dog. It was true it was the tenants fed him, but he did not advert to that.

His wife, a pretty, quiet, shy little woman, with a heart brimming over with wifely and motherly love, faded slowly like a woodland flower, in the heat and glare of their daily life. Festus, in his own way, loved her dearly, and lavished on her all that money —or credit—could procure. Her two children doted on her. But love cannot stay death, and her little deaf and dumb girl Grace was barely ten years old, and Gerald twelve, when their mother slipped from the clasp of their affection out into the vague vast world beyond the grave, where their love could only follow trembling through the darkness.

Festus Daly was a loving and still more a generous father to the little orphans. But for them, as for himself, he took no thought for the morrow. The son speedily became his friend and companion. Gerald had his gun and his pony before he was thirteen. He

was never asked to do anything he disliked. He was subjected to no greater mental strain than the reading of story-books, in which he revelled almost from a baby. It needed the strong remonstrance of friends, backed by the boy's own wish, to have him sent to Clongowes Wood College at last. But at the vacations the father had complete possession of his boy again, and it generally took three letters of remonstrance from the rector to get him back at the opening of each term.

By great good luck Festus Daly heard of the Ealing Training College, where modern miracles are wrought by what is called the oral system. It is there recognized that people are born dumb only because they are born deaf; they cannot speak only because they cannot hear. The pupil is therefore taught by watching the motion of the teacher's lips and throat to recognize the object named, and by imitating the motion to repeat the sound. So by infinite patience the miracle is accomplished, one sense does duty for another, and the deaf are made to hear and the dumb to speak.

Thither Grace was presently dispatched, and for some years her visits home were few and far between. But however scarce money was with Festus Daly, her substantial pension at the college was always regularly paid, and Grace proved a marvel even amongst marvels, the glory of the institution, and the amazement of its visitors.

The boy and girl had just come home "for good,"

as the phrase goes, when hard times began to tighten their pitiless grasp upon the jovial, reckless master of Loughile. Strange as it may seem, he had been loved by the tenants, who were plundered in his name and for his pleasure. All the "Devil's work" on the estate was put down to the agent, "bad luck to him." "Sure the master," they said amongst themselves, "never had hand, act, or part in such maneness; troth it was always a kind word he had wid him for the poor." For the Irish are a kindly people, and value the social virtues beyond their price. A soft heart goes farther with them than a hard head.

But when the inevitable struggle came at last, when famine set landlord and tenant fighting through the length and breadth of the land, the fight was the hotter and fiercer for the old kindly feeling which was as fuel to the quick blaze of passion once kindled.

Two impossibilities clashed with much noise and heat. Festus Daly could not live without rent, and the tenants had no rent to pay. He railed fiercely against "their ingratitude," forgetting on which side the burden of obligation lay. They for their part were doubly indignant that "one of the old stock should treat his people like the dirt under his feet, worse nor an upstart." Their poverty, not their will, refused the rent; his poverty, not his will, refused reductions. But neither made allowance for the other. To him they were lazy and lying rogues; to them he was a greedy and cruel tyrant.

The agent—Mr. Ruthlin—came to him constantly with lying stories of vast sums hoarded by the poor ragged wretches in nameless banks, or in the rotten thatch of their mud cabins. Evictions were threatened, the tenants replied by combination. The trouble began to prey on Festus Daly's spirits, and through his spirits on his health. He could not live out of the sunshine of smiles and good-humour. The first shadow chilled him to the soul. He seldom stirred from the house now, for he was met with sullen, angry faces, and he was more afraid of a curse or a scowl than of a bullet. So he sat at home brooding over his troubles, with Ruthlin ever at his elbow urging him on.

At length he gave his consent to a wholesale eviction. The broadside of ejectments was answered by a broadside of threatening letters. Then Festus Daly's Irish blood took fire. He resolved to see the thing out to the bitter end, while Mr. Ruthlin rubbed his hands and chuckled. But when the landlord announced his intention of being present at the eviction, his agent and his son—who seldom joined hands—both urged him vainly against such madness.

It was a miserable scene, a scene to sting the heart of its author. A wild riot rose at the outset between the famished people and the police and soldiery, who pitied them in their heart of hearts, and was quelled, not without blows and wounds. Then the evictions began. Children wailing, women screaming, men silent, but with a look of blank despair on their white

faces, all were driven from their homes as trespassing cattle are driven from a field.

At this critical moment Festus Daly rode up on his old grey hunter, the last in the stables that used to hold twenty. He was received by the angry crowd with groans and curses and showers of stones. But neither stones nor curses hurt like the sight of the abject, appalling misery of the people. His heart turned sick at the sight. All at once his sleeping, self-indulgent conscience awoke. A sudden sense of guilt and shame possessed him utterly.

He stopped the evictions there and then, and rode swiftly and silently home, locked himself for the night in his room, sent for his agent in the morning, and ordered that the reductions demanded should be forthwith made. The agent remonstrated. It was no use. The man's blood was up; while his heart was warm with pity, there was no personal loss or hardship he was not prepared to face in imagination.

So the thing was done, and then the price came to be paid. Festus Daly slowly realized that his income was now several hundreds a year less than nothing. A thousand little vulgar troubles which the care of the agent had kept from him began to harass him hourly. He was pestered for money, not as in the old days by polite entreaty, but by rude, menacing demand. To such a man squalid poverty was a torture. It brought a sense of shame not to be endured. The resolution on which he had prided himself, which had stood the shock of opposition and

remonstrance, began to crumble away before petty constant annoyances, like soft stone under dripping water. A man may be heroic wholesale, but not in detail.

Mr. Ruthlin watched him closely, and took him at his weakest with an offer too tempting to be refused.

The neighbouring landlords, Mr. Ruthlin told him, had felt themselves hurt by his surrender. His estate was the weak spot in their combination. So they had formed a syndicate and had bought up his mortgages, and were at the present moment in a position to sell him out for non-payment of interest or to evict him. But there were some technical difficulties and delays in the way. Besides, the landlords did not wish to act harshly against one of their own class unless driven to it. They had therefore commissioned Mr. Ruthlin to make him an offer. Festus Daly would be allowed the use of the Mansion House, and secured five hundred a year for life, on the condition that he would immediately assign all his right, title, and interest in the estate to Mr. Ruthlin as agent for the syndicate.

This was Mr. Ruthlin's offer as he made it; he omitted to mention that he himself was to be the purchaser and beneficial owner under the conveyance. The syndicate resolved "to make examples" of the tenants, to clear them out wholesale, and replant the estate with new settlers. Thus by sheer terror they hoped to crush out combination. Mr. Ruthlin was to do the fighting, and the syndicate

was to find the funds. The campaign to be effectual must begin at once, and the execution of the deed was to be the signal for the evictions.

At the proper moment Mr. Ruthlin made his offer, and Festus Daly, driven to the wall, accepted it. Mr. Ruthlin had brought the deed ready engrossed, and his two witnesses with him. When he left he carried an executed conveyance in his pocket, which made him lord and master of the broad lands and stately mansion of Loughile, and the mere human appurtenances thereunto belonging.

Presently the evictions broke out relentlessly all over the estate. The land war raged fiercely round the old mansion house, from which the old landlord looked out on the fight now, powerless to help or hinder. These scenes of violence and misery are off the track of this story, and can only be just glanced at in passing. The tenants were more angry than ever with the "old master," who had sold them, they said, like a drove of bullocks to the butcher. He, conscious of weakness and wrong-doing, and stung by remorse to anger, blazed out against them in turn, and swore the rascals were treated better than they deserved.

But the worry told heavily on Festus Daly all the same. He quite abandoned his customary exercise and amusement, and his thoughts turned in on himself, and worried him like dogs. His heart bled for the miserable wretches, even while he cursed them as idle scoundrels. Festus Daly had been, physically

and mentally, a strong man all his life, a man whose iron constitution cast off fatigue or sickness. But the strong cable that can stand the fiercest tugs of sickness and misfortune, may be gnawed in two by the keen incessant teeth of small annoyances. He grew gaunt and feeble. His full handsome face fell in. His portly figure shrivelled up. He hardly ate or slept, he was an old man before his time. The doctor, an old family friend, could find "nothing wrong" where all was wrong. He advised fresh air, and exercise and cheerfulness, as if cheerfulness was a drug to be used at will by internal or external application.

Festus Daly went out one May morning under pretence of fishing in the clear, broad stream that cantered merrily over the rough ground and through the woods on the skirt of the demesne. He came home with wet boots and empty basket. Next morning he had a dry, hard cough like the bark of a mongrel, the next his blood was on fire, his head racked with pain, and there was an ominous wheeze deep down in his chest. The doctor came again and shook his head. In the sudden change of his kindly face, the anxious eyes of son and daughter read "no hope." There *was* no hope, and but a short respite. The disease found all ready for it. It made itself at home from the first and stayed to the end, and the end came very soon.

It was a hard stroke for the boy and girl, left quite alone in the world. Whatever his faults

and weaknesses, Felix Daly had loved them, and been good to them, and they repaid his love tenfold.

They had fallen of late on evil days. For Gerald, all the life and spirit had gone out of the place. His father, who had been the prompter and partner of his sports, moped sadly at home. Abroad, instead of pleasant greetings for the "young master," he had evil looks and evil words. He took his father's side hotly in the struggle that was in process, and found nothing too bad to believe about the tenants.

Grace was more even-minded. She saw more if she heard less than her brother. She had sympathy for all. She did not love her father one whit less because she pitied the tenants. She went about amongst them as before, and if her charities were less than in the old days, her welcome was none the less kindly in the cabins of the poor.

Something of superstitious reverence mingled with their love for her. Her low, sweet voice was a constantly recurring miracle. As a child she had gone amongst them with closed ears and dumb lips. She could only talk to them on her slim fingers, and they had learned to read and answer.

The miracle wrought in her behalf was after her return the theme of constant wonder and kindly gossip in their cabins. She had gone away for "three years' schooling in foreign parts," and came home with a voice sweet and clear as the birds' on the bushes. She could hear too with those bright clever

eyes of hers, "God bless them, and tell the words on your lips before you spoke them."

This miracle was still the talk of many an humble fireside in the cabin homes of Loughile, the wonder breaking out in many a "Glory be to God" and "the Lord be praised." So Grace grew to be the patron saint of the estate. When rough and evil days fell upon them, that love and reverence was not lost. The noisiest and bitterest about his wrongs, in the very act of denouncing "the ould master who sold them to the stranger," would change the curses on his lips to "God save you kindly, miss," when she appeared. For the Irish are tender-hearted always, and mingled with their love and reverence for Grace there was a kindly pity for one for whom all the sweet and cheerful sounds of the world must be blank silence for ever.

CHAPTER VI

HOPE

"And hope is brightest, when it dawns from fears,
And love is sweetest—when embalmed in tears."
SCOTT, *Lady of the Lake.*

IT is strange how stunning the blow was when it fell. For months past their father had but scant share in their home life. He lived with his own sad thoughts, cared for rather than caring. But now that he was gone, it seemed as if the mainspring of the machine was broken, and nothing could go right again. His death was expected—was known to be inevitable. For more than a week he lay helpless, waiting for the end. His feeble moans had wrung their hearts with a pain keener than his own. He lived only to suffer. But now the perfect rest, the dead silence of the dead seemed a thousand times less endurable than the moans of the dying.

Grace took upon herself the office of comforter, but Gerald was not to be comforted. He wandered vaguely about the house, ever forced back again in spite of himself to the room where his dead father

lay. He clasped the cold hand in his and kissed a thousand times the still lips that would never smile or speak kind words more. If the joys of youth are brightest, the sorrow is darkest. The gloomy horizon closes down on the young soul with no gleam of light. The heart has not been made callous by many blows. It is sensitive to suffering. A weary weight lay on Gerald's mind and heart, and stunned him with the dull sense of loss, till now and again a keen throb of remembrance woke him to utter agony.

The kindly doctor took upon himself all the dismal preparations for the simple funeral. The landed gentry boycotted it, for the word had gone out that Festus Daly had behaved badly to his class. But the country folk, forgetting their grievances in their grief, made amends. A funeral has a strange attraction for the Irish peasant. A curious mysticism is the complement to his gay light-hearted character. It seems as if he hoped to peer through the open grave to the world beyond, and catch a glimpse of the faces and a hint of the voices of those who have gone before.

In eager relays the tenants carried on their shoulders the body of Festus Daly to his resting-place in the old family vault in the ruinous churchyard within the demesne walls. Many a sidelong glance of sympathy was cast upon the "young master" as he walked amongst them with pale, set face and dry eyes, seeing nothing of the bright sunshine that splashed the shady walk with gold, hearing nothing of the merriment

and music of the birds, all thought and feeling chilled by the lonely, aching void in his heart.

So he stood by the graveyard, so he knelt and uncovered his head, and saw the coffin laid away in its stone chamber, without power even to realize his own sorrow. So he returned to the lonely house.

He might have noticed, but he did not, that some of the tenants with whom he had been most familiar in the old days that now seemed so long ago, who had shared his sport on the lake or in the woods, loitered round him awkwardly with the restlessness that betokened a suppressed secret. Twice a man had approached him in the graveyard, and once on the broad avenue walk as he returned, but shrunk away shyly abashed at the sad absorbed face, with its tight-closed lips and vacant eyes.

That evening while Grace and Gerald were sitting together, silent, yet comforting each other by mere presence more than words could, a cautious knock came to the hall door.

The door was opened by the simple country girl who was the sole representative of the troop of liveried servants that had once found pleasant quarters and idleness at Loughile.

Three men pushed past the startled servant into the dark hall where she could just catch the outlines of their figures in the twilight.

"We want to see the young master for a minute, if you plaze," said a gruff voice, in a whisper that in spite of the gruffness sounded friendly and reassuring.

"He's up-stairs with Miss Grace, so he is," she replied.

"Call him down, me girl, if ye can without letting on to Miss Grace—good luck to her."

"That same is aisy enough," said Honor Cassidy.

She walked heavily up the stairs. She had been but recently broken into boots, and was as awkward in them as the cat a schoolboy has accommodated with a set of walnut shells.

Gerald and Grace were sitting close together with their backs to the door.

"Master Gerald," she cried out, "you're wanted in the hall below be three men, and you're to come down at wanst without letting on to Miss Grace."

Gerald rose instantly. "Grace," he said, "I'd like to put poor father's letters and papers into some kind of order. They are all topsy-turvey in his study. Will you wait here for me? I won't be long, and I'll send Honor with a lamp."

She could hardly see his lips move in the twilight. She touched his throat lightly with her finger tips while he was speaking.

"Don't hurry, Gerald," she answered, "and don't mind the lamp. I like the darkness."

"Who is it, Honor?" said Gerald, uneasily, when the door closed behind them. He had some thought of a moonlight visitation.

"Wan is Phaurick O'Rourke, your honour, whomsoever the others may be. I knew him on the minute be the hoarse whisper of him. It's no mis-

chief he's afther, I'll be bound. Sure he had a great graw for yer honour the worst of times."

"Well, Phaurick—what is it now?" said Gerald, as he struck a match and lit the candles on the chimney-piece of his father's snuggery.

Phaurick, a heavy-footed, broad-shouldered fellow, closed the door tight before he answered.

"Faith, not much, Master Gerald," he said, and then stopped short as if that concluded the conversation.

But there was trouble in the round, light blue eyes, in shape and colour like a sheep-dog's, that looked out of a face tanned to a uniform brick colour by wind and weather. Phaurick had been gamekeeper on the estate, and, as far as wild game went, a capital gamekeeper, and death and destruction to hawks and magpies; but he would have nothing to say to the paltry business of rearing tame pheasants for powder and shot. When the trouble came, he had thrown up his post and joined "the boys," and been the hottest and bitterest amongst them. But he had cried like a big baby when the news came of the "ould master's" death, and had helped to carry the coffin to the grave, and had hovered with awkward, bashful good-will round Gerald in the graveyard.

The sight of the fellow's honest, simple face gave the poor boy a keen pang now. It brought back the memory of many a pleasant day spent on brown heath or green woods with his father—the dogs ranging gaily in front and Phaurick with huge game

bag on his back, full of fun and feather, pacing stolidly behind. He could almost see again the dear familiar face that turned to him with bright approval, when he rolled over a hare or rabbit, or with right and left caught a brace of woodcock in full flight.

Phaurick stood all this time watching him with stolid kindness, like a great dog, and his two companions lurked bashfully in the background.

Gerald came back out of his reverie with a start.

"Well, Phaurick," he said again, "what is it? Speak up like a man. Say what you have got to say."

But the giant only shuffled with his feet and fumbled with his hat and looked at the others, who looked at the ground.

"Sorry to be troubling you, Master Gerald," he broke out at last, "and the grief and trouble that's in it. But we heard tell there was worse coming at the back of that, and we thought we would drop over and give you the hard word. You're to be put out, Master Gerald, you and Miss Grace, out of the old place, all as wan as ourselves. Ould Ruthlin has the police and the emergency men ready for the job, and it's coming over to-morrow they are. But it was not to bring you bad news all out that we came here this night of all. Me and the boys think you could bother them yet if you would be said by us."

Phaurick's manner grew more confident as he

proceeded to unfold his notable plan. His voice had a bolder tone. He no longer shuffled with his feet on the carpet, but stood erect, six foot two of muscular manhood.

"There's only half-a-dozen of emergency men be all accounts," he said, "and a score of polis to be in it. We kep double the number for a day and a half running like rats in a barn, round Pat Rafferty's bit of a thatched cabin. There's fifty of the boys ready and willing, Master Gerald, if you give us the word, and I'll go bail we'll hould the old place agin them for a year and a day. The door is a fine lump of oak with an iron bar as thick as me arm. The stone steps would be botheration to the battering ram, and we could play the divil all out with hot stirabout from the port-you-go. Miss Grace need never know nothing about it, and if you wouldn't mind the least taste of cork on your face, you might have your share of the fun and no wan a bit the wiser. Troth, you may trust us, Master Gerald; we're with you to the last drop. The bit of trouble betune ourselves and the master is clane gone out of our heads, and it's the ould times we do be thinking of."

The other two members of the embassy were roused to animation by his eagerness.

"Troth that's the truth now," said one in a deep voice, "we'll stand to you through thick and thin."

All three looked eagerly to Gerald for the signal for the battle.

For one moment the heart of the school-boy was

captured by the thought of this "barring out" on a big scale. His dark eyes flashed and his dark cheeks flushed at the prospect of the fun and fighting. He was very young, remember, and his heart was as much younger than his age as his body was older. But in a moment the madness of the thing was clear, even to his boyish mind.

"It cannot be, Phaurick. I take your offer very kindly, but it cannot be. If we must go we must, and never see the dear old place and the dear old faces again. But it is an ease to my heart that we are all parting good friends, and that kindness is the last thing I have to remember you by. You must——"

His hand slipped into his pocket with the old instinct of his race. There was but one sovereign there, and that must go in drink for those wild lads, ripe for mischief, who were much better without it.

But Phaurick saw and stopped him with the quick sensitiveness of the Irish peasant.

"Don't, Master Gerald," he pleaded, "don't spoil it. There is more nor money betune you and us this night of all. Don't make believe it's to be bought we are."

Gerald understood his feeling and drew his hand out of his pocket empty. There are times when the offer of money is an insult to the poorest Irishman.

For answer he caught hold of the huge fist that grasped his own in reply so tightly, that the tears came to his eyes and the blood to his finger tips.

"Good-bye again, Phaurick, good-bye, boys," shaking their hands in turn and sending them proud and pleased yet disappointed from the door.

Phaurick lingered last on the threshold.

"Well, good-bye and good luck, and God send you soon back to us. Me respects to Miss Grace, and the Lord keep you both, night and day, is my best prayer. I suppose," he went on, "there is no use talking any more of the business we came about, more's the pity."

"Not the least," replied Gerald, with his own bright smile, the first since his father's death, at the other's manifest disappointment. "There is to be no house-breaking nor head breaking this time, Phaurick."

"Worse luck," grumbled Phaurick, as he re-joined his companions who still lingered on the gravelled walk, with some faint hope of a more fortunate upshot of the adventure.

"Don't tell me," said Phaurick as they all went tramping heavily through the darkness down the avenue, "don't tell me." Nobody, by the way, had ventured to tell him anything. "It's the father's death that done it. The boy that I seen with my own eyes choke the life out of a wounded otter, and the beast's teeth met in the thick of his leg—is it in the nature of things that he'd back out of a bit of a tussle with that ould weasel Ruthlin, unless the sperrit was gone out of him with the grief?"

Meanwhile Gerald went back to the drawing-room

where Grace still sat, lit the lamp first, and then told her all that had passed.

They smiled at the wild scheme of Phaurick and his friends. But it was a sad smile. The thought was in both their hearts for the first time clearly realized, that they must leave their home for ever. It was a cruel wrench for both—for Gerald the harder of the two. His life had been largely lived out of doors. Every nook of the woods, every bend in the river, every crest of the hills had some pleasant memory for him. It seemed parting with his boyhood for ever to part from the old place.

Grace read his thoughts with those wonderful eyes of hers. She slipped her hand into his and squeezed it, and nestled closer to him on the great high-shouldered damask-covered sofa. The tears in her bright eyes were for him, not herself. But the sight of them made the boy a man in heart. The love of home gave place to a love more tender still.

His arm stole round his sister's waist and his lips to her cheek.

"Wherever we two are together will be home to us, my darling. I think we ought to go to Dublin at once. I was half-a-dozen times there with father, and should know my way about." His way about in those days generally led to the theatre or the circus. "We can live cheaper in Dublin and quieter, where no one knows us. Above all, it will be easier for me to get work in Dublin."

There was something almost comic in the practical

and protecting tone in which the poor boy spoke, but there was a touch of pathos too.

Grace trusted him with the confidence which physical strength inspires in her sex. She made no doubt at all that he would, somehow—she had not the least notion how—be a great success in Dublin, and make a comfortable home for both.

"There may be a little trouble at first, Grace," he said, "but we are not afraid of narrow lodging or hard fare, just for a week or two."

"You are sure to get on, Gerald," she answered admiringly, and in his heart of hearts the boy believed her.

They talked by the fire far into the night over their plans, which were as unreal and fantastic as children's make-believe. For they knew just as little of city life as the "babes" did of the woods, and were as helpless. Yet they parted, comforted and hopeful, though vague doubts and fears came when they were alone.

Phaurick and his friends proved right. The orphans were at breakfast next morning, each endeavouring to deceive the other by a pretence of eating, when Mr. Ruthlin drove up to the door on an outside car, on the other side of which were the sub-sheriff and the police inspector.

A sleek, solid man was Mr. Ruthlin, with a perspiring face and clammy hand, and a perpetual smile that showed his long, yellow teeth and his upper gums, red as sealing wax. There was a touch of the

clerical in his costume, for he did a little lay preaching sometimes in the intervals of evicting.

In the background a score of police halted, the front rank on the gravel sweep, the others stretching down the avenue, while beside the car, which had come at a walking pace, skulked half-a-dozen evil-looking emergency men, creatures quite out of place in the bright scene and sunlight.

When the car stopped close to the great flight of stone steps, one of the emergency men shambled forward to take the rug off and help Mr. Ruthlin down.

Mr. Ruthlin seemed a little abashed at the absolute quietude of the place, and glanced shame-faced at his companions. For he had requisitioned a large force of police, and had made a strong affidavit that he had reason to anticipate riot and resistance.

With a deprecatory word to the district inspector, he climbed up the stone steps, puffing a little, the obsequious emergency man still close at his heels.

There was a distinct suggestion of proprietorship in his loud, authoritative knock at the hall door. He had not finished the flourish when the door opened so suddenly that he came near falling through on his face, drawn forward by his grip on the knocker.

When he recovered himself, a little awkwardly, he found Gerald Daly at the door regarding him with that fine, frank dislike peculiar to his age and sex.

The bright, angry eyes and strong young figure shot a nervous little shiver through Mr. Ruthlin, and

somewhat deranged his customary manner of pompous self-assertion.

"Good morning, Gerald," he said with a weak assumption of patronage. "My goodness, how you have grown!" He raised his hand tentatively. But Gerald made no responsive motion. So he rubbed his chin and let the hand fall again by his side.

"Sorry to trouble you," he went on, gaining courage, as men do, from the sound of his own voice, "especially on such a very melancholy occasion. You and your good sister have my heartfelt sympathy and condolence. I had a very sincere friendship for your father, as you know, and if our relations have been less cordial of late years, I ask you to believe it was through no fault or desire of mine."

Mr. Ruthlin had been a solicitor's clerk, and had cringed and crawled into the agency. Festus Daly was more likely to make friends with his gamekeeper.

"Business is business," went on Mr. Ruthlin in a brisker voice. "Your poor father, though an excellent man in his way, could never be got to take a proper interest in business matters. But he has gone to his long account, and what are we wretched worms, that we should presume to judge the failings of our erring brethren?"

In his confusion, Mr. Ruthlin was getting entangled in the tag ends of one of his own sermons.

Gerald pulled him up short.

"Will you kindly leave my father's name alone, Mr. Ruthlin," he said, "and tell me your business here?"

"It is very unpleasant business, my young friend," said Mr. Ruthlin with an ugly look in his small eyes, but his voice as smooth as ever. "I regret very much to trouble you with legal formalities. But you will find that everything has been done according to law. Your lamented father gave a consent for judgment in ejectment, and the writ of *fieri facias* was allowed to issue on the understanding that it would not be executed during his life. It gives me the deepest pain to inconvenience you or your estimable sister, especially at such a time. But I am sure you will understand how I am situated. The tenants are in open revolt against all law, human and divine, and the owner's" —with a quiet self-complacent emphasis on "owner's" —"presence is absolutely essential. Therefore if it is quite convenient for yourself and your sister——"

"We can make it convenient," broke in Gerald. "What time must we leave?"

"Will the day after to-morrow suit you, Mr. Daly?" said the sheriff, who with the police inspector had come to the door while Mr. Ruthlin was holding forth.

"Quite well," said Gerald, turning to him with a smile and ignoring the agent.

"All right, then, the day after to-morrow let it be. I will come over in the afternoon and give up possession to the new owner. Come along, Ruthlin, our business is over here, and I'm d—d glad of it."

But the contempt with which he had been treated stung Ruthlin to the quick through his armour of

sanctimonious hypocrisy. He meant to sting in return.

"Of course you will clearly understand, Mr. Gerald Daly, that the bill of sale which I hold covers the furniture, plate, and table linen. You can see the schedule for yourself, if you have any doubt of it. I have, of course, the fullest confidence in your—ahem, —honour, but I must ask you to be very careful in your packing up, and to make the same request to your sister, lest by an accident or mistake——"

He stopped then. It was well for him he did so. The flashing eyes of the boy warned him. The strong young hands were clenched, and the muscles taut. Another word would have seen Mr. Ruthlin go head over heels down the stone steps.

At that moment Gerald felt a light touch on his shoulder, and turning, looked right into Grace's eloquent eyes.

"All right, Grace," he answered, as if she had spoken, "I won't."

He put his hands out of mischief's way, down deep in the pocket of his shooting jacket. Then with a courteous nod to the sheriff and district inspector—without a word or look for Mr. Ruthlin—he turned back with his sister to the breakfast-room.

In a moment afterwards the invading army went tramping slowly down the long avenue.

The brother and sister were less despondent than might be expected, now that the worst was known. The hurry and bustle of their preparations for depart-

ure numbed the pain at their hearts. Gerald, too, was buoyed up with the bright confidence of youth, with the boy's keen desire to be something, and to do something in the world. For he was now the head of the family and Grace dependent upon him. The cheery encouragement on the boy's face, the loving confidence on the girl's, were good to see. In the ways of the world they were both children.

Next day Dr. Burton drove over and found them busy with their packing. He had little comfort to offer. He had asked Mr. Snappett, the sharpest solicitor in the county, to examine the bill of sale. It was drawn with the utmost care and stringency. It captured everything in the place, except their own personal belongings.

Dr. Burton was an old man, silver haired and slightly stooped, yet handsome as an old-fashioned engraving. It was a clever face, yet kindly withal. His handsome mouth, with the gentle droop at the corners, spoke without speaking the genial nature of the man. It was Dr. Burton's misfortune to be too good for his work and surroundings. It was boiling potatoes in a vessel of gold when fate made him a country practitioner. He had a passion for his profession. At forty he taught himself German because the best treatise on some recondite disease was hidden from him in that language. He was abreast with the latest developments of modern science, yet none of the every-day symptoms of every-day disease escaped him. His eye was keen as a

hawk's, his touch delicate as a lady's. His nerve, when occasion called for it, like wrought steel. He had all the qualities that go to make a great physician and surgeon, yet he was a failure, as the world counts failures. He lacked the saving salt of worldly wisdom. He made wonderful cures, but his reputation profited little by them, and his pocket not at all. He knew nothing of the gentle art of self-advertisement. He did not exaggerate danger to enhance success. He took his cures so much as mere matter of course that his patients felt justified in doing the same. To kindliness and intelligence, he had good looks and social qualities of a high order. In his younger days, none could sing a better song. Even now, none could tell a story with more subtle humour. His worst fault was an impatience of boredom. He had no toleration of mere dulness. He could not talk for talk's sake. He was not rude to bores. He could not be rude if he tried. But he escaped from them at the first opportunity to his beloved books, and they who were quick at nothing else were quick enough to take offence at his avoidance. The dull people thought badly of him, and as most people are dull, he was not popular.

So Dr. Burton was a favourite with few, and had few favourites ; but amongst those Gerald and Grace were first. The old man got back something of his own youth in the companionship of the bright, brave, impulsive boy. Grace, too, had grown very close to his heart, first for her brother's sake, then for her own.

The doctor stayed for dinner, and a pleasant little meal they had in the great old-fashioned dining-room, with its fine pictures, landscapes for the most part, standing out well from the rich ruby-coloured wall-paper that co-operated cordially with fire and light to make the room cheery.

Gerald was excited, talkative, not altogether coherent, eyes bright, cheeks flushed, half-exhilarated, half-frightened by the coming change. Grace, on the other hand, was quite silent. Only her eager eyes showed she shared her brother's excitement.

To the doctor the boy talked freely of his plans—if shifting-day dreams deserved the name—and ever and again the doctor allayed the fervour of his spirit by a few cool drops of worldly prudence.

When dinner was over, Grace, by way of retiring, drew an easy-chair close to the fire, and, burying herself cosily in the deep nest of brown morocco, was, or seemed to be, absorbed in a delicate piece of fancy work.

"Help yourself, doctor," said Gerald, "and pass the decanter."

Boys will be boys, and what is more boyish than assuming to be a man?

The doctor smiled, amused, as he sipped his port; but there was something of sadness in his smile. The thought in his mind was "how will this good-hearted, innocent young fellow do in the rough hard struggle that is before him?" There was only one way he could help.

"Gerald," he said, "have you ever thought of the medical profession?"

"Well, doctor, I may have thought of it as I have thought of the moon, but I never hoped to get there. It takes four years, and that's as far off as the moon for me. It would hardly suit us to live upon nothing for four years, besides the expense. No, I mean to set to work at once."

"At what?"

"Well, that I have not quite made up my mind about yet," just as if there were a dozen promising careers open to him. "I must look about me a bit in Dublin before I decide. But I have no doubt there's work for those that are able and willing, and I am willing enough any way."

The doctor did not like to damp his courage. It might prove his best friend in the trials before him.

"*Possunt quia posse videntur*," he muttered to himself; "who knows?"

"But," he said, "you must live while you look about you, Gerald. Now I'm the oldest friend your father had, and you must let me——"

Gerald coloured to his hair, and stammering in his eagerness broke in upon him—

"We don't want it, really and truly we don't. If we did I'd come straight to you. Poor father gave me £97 out of his desk a week before he died. It was all he had left, but it is enough, and more than enough. I'll have got work before that is spent if I'm ever to get it."

It must be confessed that last "if" was tossed off a little conceitedly. He had a boy's splendid confidence in his own powers and prospects.

After that the doctor said nothing more of money; but he sat with them far into the night, chatting pleasantly of many things, and deftly sliding words of caution and worldly wisdom through the pleasant talk. He feared for them the reaction of the night and loneliness. He knew that the spirits of youth as they rise high, fall low; that its misery is acute as its happiness.

It was close on midnight when he said "good-bye;" and merciful sleep came quickly and saved Grace and Gerald from that last long night of grief and loneliness.

They had fixed to go to Dublin by the midday train. A little after daybreak Gerald was away for a long walk over the grounds. He could not resist the temptation of one last look at the scenes he loved so well. But he had said nothing of this to Grace, thinking with a new-found fatherly feeling that the "poor girl would need rest."

The beauty of the morning saddened him. As he saw the red rim of the sun peer over the crest of the eastern hills the thought struck, like a stab, that it was the last time he should be there to see it. All the familiar scenes filled him with sad remembrances. The ghost of his dead father walked beside him through the woods and by the river bank. There was the tall pine, naked to the tuft at its top, which he had climbed

for a hawk's nest. From that swirling pool in the eager brown stream he had drawn his first trout. A trout leaped in it as he passed. At this corner of the deep woods his first pheasant had come fluttering down, golden and glorious in the sunshine. Those days could never come again. He was going away for ever. Some vague thoughts of coming back as a millionaire flitted through his mind. But they were too shadowy to comfort him.

He turned sharp round, and made for the house. The way lay through the woods. About a mile from home he came upon an open glade he had known and loved from boyhood. It was an almost perfect quadrangle, closed in on all sides by high walls of verdure, and floored with a smooth green turf over which the rabbits, brown and white, rolled like fluffy footballs towards the wood as he broke in upon the solitude. But the place was famous chiefly for its goldfinches. They fluttered through the tree tops. They flitted ever and again in trailing wisps across the open, singing as they went, the gold of their wings and the crimson of their crests showing like live jewels in the sunshine, while the still morning air throbbed with their music.

In spite of himself, in spite of his boyish pride, the tears trembled in Gerald's eyes as he looked and listened.

But he brushed them aside, for the shadows stirred on the far side of the green quadrangle, then out through the verdant wall a slim figure stepped like a wood nymph into the open.

"Grace," cried Gerald delightedly, and in a moment he was beside her. She turned with the same delight in her eyes, luminous through her tears. As his arm slipped round her waist and her head sank contentedly on his shoulder they both felt how foolish it was to have taken their farewell walk alone.

"I was so sad when you came, Grace," he said.

"And I, too; sad and lonely."

"My darling, I'm selfish. I had forgotten your sadness. I had forgotten how much harder it must be for you."

"It is very hard to leave this lovely place, which we once thought all our own." Her eyes and face seemed to reflect the beauty of the sylvan scene as she spoke.

Yet to her the crowning charm of the gay birds' song was wanting. For her a dead silence reigned perpetual in the world. No sweet sound could ever charm her ears or move her heart. But the great God is very good. To each of his creatures some good gift is given. To one an eye for beauty, to another an ear for music, to a third that vivid imagination that, silent or singing, makes the poet.

"It is hard to be sent adrift, Grace, but, thank God, we are adrift together, always together."

"I will be but a burden to you."

"A help and comfort. Without you, without your love, I would break down altogether, and my life would go to wreck and ruin."

"It is very good of you to say that, Gerald. You

are always good to me. If I could only hope that in spite of—in spite of everything I might just once be of real help to you, I would feel so happy."

He answered her with a kiss, and so, comforting and comforted, they went back together through the green woods, and he talked bravely and she listened hopefully.

CHAPTER VII

DESPAIR

"What is that which I should turn to, lighting upon days like these?
Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys.
Every gate is thronged with suitors, all the markets overflow.
I have but an angry fancy: what is that which I should' do?"

TENNYSON.

GERALD and Grace stayed in Dublin at a small quiet hotel, specially recommended by Dr. Burton, till Gerald had, as he said, "time to look about him." It was not, as has been said, his first visit. He had been there dozens of times, staying always at the best hotels,—for pantomimes as a child, horse shows, flower shows, and all the rest of it, later on. His father had been with him then, delighted with his delight, flinging money away with both hands, loading him with presents, and satiating him with amusement.

This was a very different visit, and yet the contrast was not altogether unpleasant. At least it was the love he missed, not the money. Though where his

father never stopped to count the sovereigns, he must count the halfpence.

With youth's love of novelty and exaggeration, at first they both took a keen delight in petty economies, as it were playing at being paupers and misers. The first thing was to find lodgings, "for the hotel"—they told each other in confidence—"was terribly dear." Arm in arm they sallied down the broad street, open-eyed with excitement and importance.

Grace's strange gift told her, in spite of herself, the thoughts of those whose lips she watched as they hurried past. No one talked or thought of them. They were more alone there at mid-day in the crowded thoroughfare than in the lonely woods at Loughile.

They turned into a quieter street and began their quest. It is not needful, thank goodness, to follow them in that wearisome mission, beginning in excitement and ending in exhaustion. It was a veritable paper hunt from one card in the window to another. The two chief drawbacks were expense or slovenliness. Where the rooms were not dear they were dirty, when they were not dirty they were dear. Then the landladies were smirking, suspicious, or sarcastic, as the humour took them, and retreat had often to be effected under a hot fire of "Not suitable, indeed! Then why did you ask to see them? I suppose it's a palace you want for fifteen shillings a week?" or, "Too dear? Well, I'm sure—what next! The rooms were never let for the money before. Oh!

no trouble at all; but it would be well for all parties if you could make up your mind as to the *class* of lodgings you require."

Gerald was soon sick to death of the business. The perpetual opening of doors and climbing of stairs worried him to a condition of irritation that was worse than pain.

Grace was patience itself. She went from place to place, looked and questioned without a trace of irritation. Incredible as it may sound to male ears, she actually enjoyed the excursion. It was another variety of shopping and bargain making, which are to feminine taste the most delightful forms of sport. A woman will hunt a bargain as a man will hunt a fox, and if she fail will take the pleasure of the chase for her reward. She will shop all day, as a man will shoot or fish all day, without thought of fatigue.

At length, more by good fortune than good management, they found exactly what they wanted.

It was right at the end of a little pocket of a street, behind a stately church of composite architecture. The good-humoured face of the girl who opened the door impressed them favourably from the first. The rooms completed the good impression. Two neat little bedrooms at the top of the house, on the same landing; and for a sitting-room what had once been a conservatory, the glass roof now neatly curtained in crimson cretonne that made a warm diffused light in the room.

"You're very welcome, miss, and I do my best to

make the lodgers comfortable," said the good-humoured servant, with inviting cheerfulness.

So the bargain was made, and they went home rejoicing at their success.

They "moved in," as the phrase is, next day, with two cab loads of their belongings, in which Gerald's books made a brave show. The very smallness of the rooms had a charm for them. It saved them from comparison with the spacious and stately apartments of Loughile, and flattered the Robinson Crusoe notion that lurked vaguely in their minds and coloured their thoughts. They half fancied at times they were camping out and would go home pleasantly when the frolic was over. These poor little rooms began after a while to take upon them something of the sanctity of home. There are some people who carry their homes about with them in habits and affections, who grow to a place and cannot be uprooted without something like pain. Others there are whose minds and hearts put down no roots, with whom remembrances and associations count as nothing; to whom home is no more than the walls and floor and ceiling and doors and windows and furniture, who value a "home" solely for its comfort or splendour, and are ever ready to change for one more comfortable or more splendid.

Often in after life Gerald Daly visited again in fancy that scantily-furnished sitting-room with its translucent roof and cosy, rosy lightsomeness; for the troubles and joys he had known there were ever

for him a part of the place. He would often in fancy sit again in the broken-down arm-chair with his head buried in his hands, heart-sick with disappointments, while Grace knelt beside him speaking words of hope and courage, and resolutely denying herself the luxury of tears. The memory of that long ordeal was sweetened by the thought of the relief that came at last when hope was well-nigh dead.

They had a hard and anxious time when they first faced the world together.

Gerald started in life's handicap full of hope and courage. No wonder; there was a good excuse for his boy's self-complacency. He had been first in his class in Clongowes, a "dab" at English composition, an eloquent "spouter" on the exciting topics whether Rome or Greece was the greatest nation, or Cæsar or Napoleon the greatest general. What, in the world of boys, was infinitely more important, he was "good at the games." He was captain of the cricket club, and his famous "on drive" in a "foreign" match with the "Phœnix," measuring one hundred and seven yards, is shown to new comers to this day. He had always a good time. Though the masters liked him, his popularity with his comrades stood the crucial test of masters' favour.

In his quest of employment Gerald let no grass grow under his feet. The very next morning he set out to seek his fortune, modern fashion, with half-a-dozen advertisements cut from the newspapers in his pocket-book. His first try was for a tutorship. The

deference with which he was received at the big hall door of the big house in Merrion Square was a bad omen, if he only had the wit to have known it.

"Would you kindly step into the study, sir? Sir Gregory will be here in a moment. Thank you, sir."

The "thank you, sir," was for Gerald's card which he had handed him, with boyish pride; the "Loughile" stroked out and the new Dublin address written in.

A moment afterwards, Sir Gregory bustled into the room, all pomposity and politeness. A tall and portly man was Sir Gregory, with red face, dull eyes, fluffy grey hair, and not too much of it. His father had been a solicitor and had practised himself into a large estate. Naturally Sir Gregory prided himself on being a country gentleman, bred and born.

"Good morning, Mr. Daly," he said, greeting Gerald with what was meant for county cordiality, "delighted to see you. I had the pleasure of meeting your father once, though I fear he would hardly remember me. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? If there is anything that I can do to serve you, Mr. Daly, I shall be most happy."

The poor boy blushed to the roots of his hair, and felt ashamed to mention what his errand was. He was conscious of having gained Sir Gregory's friendliness on false pretences. But it was his way to go straight at a difficulty.

"Sir Gregory," he broke in upon his protestations, "I came about the advertisement."

"Oh! I see, I see," cried Sir Gregory with unabated good-humour. "Well, to tell you the truth, I usually leave these matters to my agent. But I'm sure you and I will have no difficulty whatever in arranging it. You would forgive my saying you are just the man I would like for the place."

Gerald's heart beat high.

"The terms are pretty high," said the other. "I hope you won't think them too high."

"If he doesn't, I'm not likely to," thought Gerald, a bit puzzled. But he said aloud, "Whatever you think reasonable, Sir Gregory."

"One hundred and fifty may seem a bit stiff for a small place," said Sir Gregory, "but it is worth every penny of it. The lodge is tolerably comfortable, and there is not better all-round shooting in Ireland."

"Shooting," said Gerald, "I don't suppose I'll have much time for shooting."

"Oh! if fishing is more in your line, there are good trout and plenty of them both in the river and the lake, besides an off chance of a salmon."

"Well, of course, I don't object to a day's sport in the least, and, if you wish it, I think I can give the boys a few wrinkles with rod and gun. I'm glad you think I will suit the place."

"The place will suit you, it was made for you."

"The terms certainly seem very liberal."

"I never got less."

"Got less? gave you mean."

"Well, gave it for less, if you like to put it that way."

"Gave what for less?" retorted Gerald, now completely mystified.

"Let, I mean."

"Let what?"

"Ardraven Lodge, of course, and the shooting that you called about."

"Shooting! I call about shooting?"

"Yes, yes," testily, "the shooting I advertised. You said so this moment."

"I! I never said so, Sir Gregory. I never dreamt of such a thing. I called about the advertisement for a tutor."

"Oh-o-oh!" Sir Gregory fell back in his chair.

All his pomposity evaporated in that prolonged "oh." He fumbled for Gerald's card which he had slipped into the ticket-pocket of his coat.

"Mr. Daly of Loughile," he gasped out.

"Late of Loughile," interrupted Gerald, flushed, excited, and ashamed, as if he had been suddenly detected in some attempted trick. "You have not heard, I suppose, Sir Gregory, that I have lost my father, and the old place has passed into other hands, and that I have to work for my living, and to provide for myself."

He did not like bringing Grace's name in.

"I am indeed greatly grieved," said Sir Gregory

his company manners coming back to him, "deeply grieved at your sad bereavement, though I had not the pleasure of knowing your father personally. I most heartily wish you all success"—there was a touch of patronage in his voice—"in your meritorious undertaking. But the position in regard to which you have called is entirely below your attention and attainments. The salary is only £50 a year."

"I would be quite content with £50 a year," broke in Gerald eagerly.

"You think so," said Sir Gregory, smiling benignly, "but I know better. My boys are young, and I'm afraid troublesome, and—shall I confess it?—I have not always complete control over my own temper. I assure you my last tutor——" On second thoughts Sir Gregory thought it better not to finish the story of what the last tutor had done or been done by. "The place is quite unsuitable," he added, letting the last tutor drift.

"I would do my best, sir," said Gerald earnestly, "my very best."

"I am quite sure of that. But apart from your want of experience—which would under any circumstances be a fatal objection—for your own sake, I could not dream of letting you accept the position. You have a career before you, I have no doubt. Some day I may remind you that I said so. Meanwhile I again most heartily wish you all success. No trouble at all, no trouble, I assure you," as he very courteously showed him to the door.

Completely crestfallen, Gerald found himself at the wrong side of the door. But before he was half-way down Nassau Street he was laughing heartily, and thinking how Grace would laugh at the muddle.

"It's just as well," he said—there was a deal of human nature about that fox in the fable—"It is better as it is. I could never have pulled with that pompous old buffer. Then, as he said, I have no experience, and I'd have to be away from Grace, and, oh! it is ever so much better as it is."

He dived into his pocket-book for another of the advertisements which he had cut out, and he read it over, while affecting to look into a jeweller's shop.

"Wanted," it ran, "a steady, active, and intelligent solicitor's clerk. Must have a good knowledge of shorthand. Apply personally, Mr. Witticomb's office, No. 60, Cuningham Street."

"That's what would suit me. I would have my evenings with Grace, and perhaps I might be able to attend college and pick up a few of the big prizes, and then I could work along until I became a solicitor and make a pile, and if the old place came into the market again, perhaps——"

He had his unhatched chickens almost completely counted by the time he crossed over into Cuningham Street. There is no process of mental arithmetic more rapid or more unsatisfactory.

In the outer office there were a dozen men and boys, standing about and laboriously ignored by the

two clerks and the two apprentices who were writing for bare life.

They were, plainly, intelligent, active, and (more or less) steady competitors for the post.

Gerald viewed them with a quick twinge of anger. He mentally matched himself against each in his turn, with results satisfactory to his hopes.

The four slaves of the desk looked up, and one got up as Gerald entered the office.

"Take a seat for one moment," said the apprentice, civilly. "The guv-n—Mr. Witticomb will be ready in a moment."

So while his competitors kicked their heels impatiently in the outer office, Gerald passed, with fatal facility, to the inner sanctum of the great man.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Daly; sit down, sit down. Well, what's troubling you, sir?" he swung round on his revolving desk-chair, and beamed at Gerald through his gold-bound spectacles with almost fatherly kindness.

Warned by his last experience, Gerald went into the subject with a splash.

"I came about the advertisement for a clerk, sir." Mr. Witticomb started for a moment, then laughed a pleasant little laugh, soft and smooth, as a cat purring.

"You don't mean for yourself?"

"Indeed I do."

"You're joking surely?"

"I am in dead earnest."

"But, my dear Mr. Daly, your father surely——"

"My father is dead. I have got to work for my living."

There was the faintest change in the temperature of Mr. Witticomb's smile, as when the wind shifts round to the east though the sun still shines. The smile was as bright as ever but a little colder. Some people declared that Mr. Witticomb could smile with the back of his head.

"My dear young friend," he went on blandly, "the thing is preposterous. I can only afford to give my clerk twenty-five shillings a week, it would not dress you as you are dressed for six months."

"I can dress cheaply, sir."

"The work is very hard and dry, my dear young friend, very dry and hard."

"I will do my best."

"No doubt, no doubt. You have observed, of course, that a thorough knowledge of shorthand is needed. But——"

"I can write one hundred and thirty words a minute, sir."

"Yes, yes. But as I was going to say, I must not look at this from a personal or selfish point of view. Personally I would be delighted to engage you at once, even though you did not write a word of shorthand or longhand for that matter. I would be delighted to overlook the fact that you have none of that experience which is the one essential qualification for the position. Your manner and appearance are quite enough for me. I would, I say, engage you at

once and endeavour to teach you the little I know of our attractive, learned, and elevating profession. But it cannot be. It would be unfair, ungracious, ungenerous of me. I could not accept the sacrifice of your future prospects."

"But, sir——"

"My dear young friend, you will live to thank me for this. I will watch your future career, which I am sure will be a distinguished one, with the keenest interest. If at any time I can be of the slightest service, at whatever cost or inconvenience, you must never scruple to invite my assistance, which will be always at your disposal. Jenkins."

"Yes, sir."

"Good-day, Mr. Daly. I trust I may soon have the pleasure of seeing you again."

One more application Gerald attempted before he returned disconsolate to his sister.

There, at least, he had no reason to complain of extra politeness.

In a glass and mahogany fort in the centre of a wholesale and retail grocery establishment, he found a stout, red-whiskered, bald-headed man, with a diamond ring on his middle finger, and cuff sleeves much frayed at the edges, to whom he submitted his application.

"We want a man who is up to his business, not a gent who is above it," said the man shortly. "You think you do a business man proud by looking at him, I suppose."

Gerald was hard put to refrain from replying to this insolence, school-boy fashion, with a blow. He made an undignified exit, very hot and red, with a strong inclination to cry.

Grace was waiting on the stairs as his latch-key grated in the lock, ready to exult or condole as his face invited.

"Don't be cast down," she whispered as she kissed him. "You could not hope to succeed the first day."

She would not listen to his adventures till he had his dinner and his pipe—he had learned to smoke at school because it was forbidden—and the first effervescence of his day's annoyance had subsided. Then she so soothed and sympathized that hope came back slowly.

But that day's failure sobered him. There was now the dogged resolve to succeed, but the boyish self-confidence was lost for ever.

No need to dog his steps, as failure did, for the next month. It was the old disheartening story, grown monotonous by a thousand repetitions, but all the more sad for its horrible monotony. He seemed to be the one superfluous man. There was no room for him, no work for him, anywhere. His advantages told more strongly against him than defects. Somehow men did not like giving low wages and hard work to an applicant who looked like a young Lifeguardsman, and who in spite of himself spoke to them on terms of easy equality. He tried

everything, sinking at last to the quest of the most menial posts, all without avail. He never haggled about terms, he was willing to go anywhere, do anything, take anything. This very willingness weighed in the wrong scale. His references and testimonials were too good. What did a billiard marker or a coachman (he had come down to that at last) want of a sound English and classical education, not to speak of the other things which his kindly old masters at Clongowes crammed into the letters they wrote at his request! He offered such a bargain of himself and his accomplishments that it bred suspicion, as bargains will. It was not worth while to test the suspicion by inquiry. Refusal was shorter and safer, and the one convenient excuse was always ready to hand, simple and effective, "he had no experience." It was repeated so often that Gerald began to wonder how anybody ever began anything.

The repetition of disappointments hurt him horribly. His hope died, like a flame without fuel. He tried to make the best of things for Grace's sake and she for his. They assumed a cheerfulness and had it not, so both were robbed of the sympathy that would have made their trouble lighter.

It is said, and truly, that youth is the season of the keenest enjoyment. Those kindly old proverbs, "It's a long lane that has no turning," and "The blackest hour is that before the dawn," have no place in the philosophy of youth. The joy or the grief of youth

are to endure for ever. There is to be no cloud again or there is to be no sunshine.

Night had closed in dark and impenetrable round Gerald, and he could find no glimmer of hope in the darkness. Poor boy! he was very miserable in those days. The thought that he was nothing and could do nothing, that he was useless in the working world, tortured his self-respect. He raged against it. But it clung and stung. In after years the memory of those dismal days was a wholesome tonic in moments of petulance or despondency.

He was not a help, he told himself, but a hindrance to Grace, whom his father trusted to his care. He was living on the poor pittance that should be all hers. He tried all sorts of petty economics. He ate a bun for dinner and made false pretence to Grace that he had dined at a restaurant. He took a kind of dismal pleasure in going about hungry. But still, in spite of economy, their money went out steadily, if slowly, and none came back. There is no greater blessing or curse, as the case may be, than a vivid imagination. It is a glass in which enjoyment or misfortune show close and clear. Gerald had lived for good or evil in the future, and now the future was worse than the present. How was it to end when they had no money for rent or food? What was to become of Grace? He strove to shut his mind against such thoughts, but they plagued him incessantly.

Still the dismal days went by; and the money

dripped slowly away, shilling by shilling, pound by pound.

He still doggedly sought for employment all day and every day, but always with the same result or want of result. Nothing succeeds like success. Nothing fails like failure, and his failure was complete. When Grace had gone to bed he sat up late into the night, writing. Here at least was an occupation open to all. As he scribbled diligently night after night, warming his chilled finger tips at his cheap lamp, he pleased himself with the thought of literary success.

But what he wrote with pleasure, he read with disgust. He knew a good story and a bad, and he knew his own was very bad. It seemed so easy and was so hard. Stories seemed to tell themselves when he read them. But he could not get any life or go into what he wrote. His people made set speeches or talked nonsense, and all made the same kind of speeches or talked the same kind of nonsense. When he took pains he grew pompous. It was the knack he needed, not the power—if he only knew it. Luckily for the boy the sense of criticism was alive in him, not slain by self-conceit. He knew his work was dull and commonplace as well as any "d—d good-natured" critic could have told him.

So he was saved the dreary task of hawking the manuscript from publisher to publisher.

One night when his heroine would persist in preaching, instead of love-making, he gathered all the labori-

ous sheets into a crumpled bundle, crammed them into the empty grate, and set a match to the pyre. He cowered for a moment over the sudden blaze, then with his last hope in black ashes, he went to bed dismally in the dark.

CHAPTER VIII

A HELPING HAND

"In the Lexicon of Youth which fate reserves for a bright manhood, there is no such word as Fail."—BULWER LYTTON.

GRACE was down before him next morning. The breakfast things were laid, but she was not sitting at the table, but standing waiting for him. It was the dawn of a dismal day. The rain pattered and gurgled on the glass roof of the little sitting-room. But there was a quiet sunshine in Grace's face that defied the weather.

"Gerald," she said, as she kissed him good-morning, "do you think these things are any use?"

The little chintz couch, a compromise between a sofa and an easy-chair, was covered with a gay-coloured litter which overflowed on to the dingy carpet.

There were a score of dainty trifles of her own creation. She had the eye of an artist, and the hand of an artist with needle, pencil, or paint-brush. There were landscapes there, wrought in silk threads, with all the bright tints and delicate shading of water-

colour. Beside those silk mosaics were daintily carved fans, an ivy leaf or an oak leaf, painted with bees and butterflies, their gorgeous wings extended, creeping over the shining green. The very sight of those pretty trifles brought Gerald's thoughts back to the great bow window in the drawing-room in Loughile where Grace loved to work. Many a time he had leant over her chair in wonder and admiration. He had packed those treasures carefully when they came away, and he wondered how and why they came out now.

"Good for anything?" he said, "why they are beautiful. Are you fishing for compliments, Grace? Haven't I told you often enough and plain enough what I think of your work? It does my eyes and heart good to look at these pretty things. If we only had a drawing-room, Grace, they would make it the brightest in Dublin."

"But we haven't a drawing-room, and are not likely to have for a while. I'll promise to decorate it when we get it. Meanwhile, Gerald, I was thinking that perhaps you might——"

She hesitated for a second, and then he knew what she meant. It was a sharp twinge for his pride, the sharpest of all. He knew she was right. These things would sell. But he had felt so proud and patronizing in his resolve to be everything to her and do everything for her, that it stung his pride to the quick. She, whom he had thought a poor, helpless girl, she could succeed. She could make

money, while he was nothing but a good-for-nothing, hulking incumbrance.

All this went through his mind as a long dream is dreamt, in an instant, and in the same instant she read his thoughts.

"I was thinking," she went on with hardly a pause, "that perhaps you might help me to fix some of these things about this little room. They would make it more home-like."

It sounded so natural that he was deceived. The smooth hypocrisy of affection was perfect in look and tone. She was disappointed, but woman-like hid her disappointment with such cheeriness that he too was cheered in spite of himself.

But the sunshine died out of his heart when he stepped out into the street on his profitless, hopeless task of work-hunting. The bitter thoughts began to worry him again. A pricking thorn hurts more than a sabre cut. So Gerald found it. His self-love was tortured by the sting of self-contempt. He felt he had been jealous of Grace, and hated himself for it. It was silly, selfish, and, most intolerable word of all, it was mean. Yet in spite of all his self-schooling he could not even yet endure the thought that she should succeed where he had so hopelessly failed. He clenched his teeth and resolved that he would get work, he must get work—he cared not what—for which money might be had. One chance was all he needed, and he would show what he could do. Resolve commands success, we are told. He did not find it

so. After a dozen squalid failures and vulgar repulses, he went lagging home, footsore and heartsick, through the slimy mud and clammy rain.

The little sitting-room was a very oasis of light and warmth and comfort. His slippers were warming at the fender. With a quick glance he noticed that she had not forgotten the incident of the morning. To remove all suspicion of its meaning from his mind, she had decorated the room tastefully with the choicest bits of her handiwork, making him more ashamed than ever of his own petty envy.

He noted too, as she kissed him, that there was some new thought in her mind, some new hope shining in those translucent eyes of hers.

As he knelt down on the hearthrug with his clammy numbed fingers within an inch or two of the clear fire, she came close behind him and put her hands on his shoulders and her soft cheek close to his.

"I've an idea, Gerald. It is a very ordinary and obvious one, and I only wonder it was so long coming. But it may be good for something, for all that."

"What is it, Grace?" turning round that she might hear him with her eyes.

"We might write to Doctor Burton. I know he would help us if he could. I don't mean in that way, Gerald,"—in answer to the sudden flush on his face—"but he could advise us, and who knows he might help you to some opening? If you once got a chance there would be no fear."

A month before Gerald would have kissed her and

laughed at her as Old Mother Goose. There always had been a touch of pity mixed with his affection for Dr. Burton, as for a man, too good indeed, but also too simple for the wicked, worldly world on which Gerald looked out with the profound knowledge and lofty superiority of nineteen years. But now the pride was all gone dead out of him. He only felt that it was useless for the doctor or any one else to try and help him.

"I'm ashamed, Grace, I'm ashamed, that's the real truth, to write to Dr. Burton. I don't suppose he could do much, anyhow. But I'm ashamed to ask him to do anything. I have treated him badly, I never sent him a line since we left. At first I was waiting till I had succeeded, and then——"

"Well, I have written once or twice, and I know the dear old doctor is not huffy, and he will be glad to help us if he can. But come on to dinner now, you must be starving. We can talk of this afterwards."

The result was, of course, that Gerald was talked over. That night a very long and humble letter was written to Dr. Burton, Grace leaning over her brother's shoulder and watching the pen as it flew. He only asked, in a shamefaced way, for advice. But she squeezed a little postscript in skew-ways. "Come and see us," she wrote; "that's the best way. We are longing for the sight of a family face. Do please come. Grace."

The doctor smiled as he read the letter and post-

script the next morning in his own shabby, comfortable study, where the disorderly books crowded and shouldered and elbowed each other jealously into all sorts of obscure nooks and corners, as the authors did when they were alive. But there was a touch of sadness in the doctor's kindly smile.

"My poor boy," he said, as he put down the letter. "My bright, brave boy. He has had his first wrestle with the world and has not come out uppermost. He will be the better for the tussle, no doubt; but I believe I liked him best with his head up away amongst the clouds, hoping and believing all kinds of impossible things, and I'm afraid I'll never see that Gerald Daly again. He has said 'good-bye' to his boyhood. Poor little Grace, too!" Dr. Burton had seen her at her very youngest, and thought of her as a child. "How cheerily she writes. Of course I'll see them. My patients must take care of themselves for one day."

He wired that he would breakfast the next morning and stay over night—if they could make room for him.

Straightway Grace and Maria—the good-humoured country girl from the county Kildare—on whose cheeks, in spite of city air, hard work, and poor fare, the peony roses bloomed perennial, bustled about in preparation for his coming.

"It's a trate for any one to come to see them," Maria confided to her special friend the baker, as she ordered the requisite extra roll. "They have been

livin' as lonely as the babes in the woods, the craturs. There is Mr. Gerald, a fine young gentleman wearin' his heart out and dwindlin' away to nothing; and there's Miss Grace lettin' on to smile when he's by and cryin' her beautiful eyes out when he's not, and shure that same's the pity, for it's eyes like a courtin' hawk she has, no less, so bright and so tender. Stop that nonsense, I tell you—do you think it's a fool you have in it? What was I sayin'—troth and I'm real glad there's a friend come to look after them at last."

Dr. Burton caught the morning train and breakfasted with them in the quaint little sitting-room. There was something so contagious in his quiet good-humour, that Gerald was cheered into the hope of some way out of his troubles. In Grace's eyes there was a look of wistful entreaty, to which the doctor's kind heart was quick to respond.

"Well, Grace," he said, at last, as he pushed away his plate with the bare bone of his chop on it, and began to fiddle with the toast and marmalade, "what is it?"

"Ask Gerald," said Grace.

"I can get nothing to do, doctor," broke in Gerald, without waiting to be asked; "I have tried everything."

"Everything?" said the doctor, with a smile, "isn't that rather a large order? Patience, patience, Gerald, will pull you through. A long, quiet, steady pull is the thing. Jerking will only break the oar.

Now let us talk things over. Let us take stock, as it were, before we bring our goods to market. What can you do?"

"Nothing, doctor, nothing that anybody wants doing, or will pay for the doing of. You know I used to think no small beer of myself. What a conceited booby I was! But now all the conceit is taken out of me. I am not worth sixpence in the open market."

"Come, come, my boy. I am not going to take your word for that. Didn't they teach you anything at Clongowes?"

"I know the three R's. I can write a decentish hand. I was rather a dab at French and Italian. I know a little—not much—about Latin and Greek. I did pretty well at mathematics. I was captain of the cricket eleven and——, there you are. What in Heaven's name is the use of it all? Will any one pay me for doing a proposition in Euclid, or stumbling through an easy bit of Homer or Horace without a dictionary, or for knocking up a century off my own bat? Not likely."

"Anything else?" asked the doctor with imperturbable good-humour.

"Nothing else, except shorthand, which I taught myself when by right I should have been at something else. Another chap and myself went in for it. We used to have bets which could do most words a minute. I could do a hundred and thirty at a spurt."

The doctor's face brightened, his good-humoured smile changed to hopeful purpose.

"You know the story of the cat, Gerald, that thought so little of his single accomplishment that saved his life, when the fox with his bagful of tricks was chopped by the hounds? I shouldn't wonder at all if that shorthand lark was the making of you. I happen to know St. John Grayle, the editor and proprietor of the chief Dublin newspaper. We were medical students together. I think he will give you a trial for my asking. There is no place where a young fellow like you with pluck and brains—you need not shake your head, Grace agrees with me—has a better chance of showing what stuff he is made of than in a newspaper office."

Half-an-hour afterwards they were stepping out briskly for the office of the *Free Press*. The boy's face as he strode along was a wonderful study of shyness and excitement. A newspaper office was to him a region of mystery. The newspaper was a concrete, impersonal thing that issued from it as the oracle from the temple in the old days, without human agency. He had not the least notion how it was done. That he himself should be suddenly invited to enter the arcania and take part in the ceremonial was an audacious proposal that took his breath away.

They found St. John Grayle in his own private office. He was standing with his face to the window and his back to his desk, piled with scattered papers and long strips of printed proofs. But he turned sharp round as they entered.

"Hallo, Burton," he cried; "why, it's good for

sore eyes and better for sound ones to see you in Dublin."

Gerald felt surprised that he looked and spoke like an every-day person, not in the least like the high priest of the mysteries. He was a short, thick-set man, with a sturdy, square figure, and a sturdy, square face. Shrewdness and good-humour were in his twinkling grey eyes, and in the lines of his firm mouth—

> "His slow, wise smile
> Seemed half within and half without,
> And full of dealings with the world."

"What good luck brought you to Dublin?" he went on, as he shook Dr. Burton's hand warmly. "You'll dine with me to-day? Well, to-morrow then, if that suits you better. Who is the youngster?"

Gerald stood bashfully apart, dumfounded at the mysterious possibilities of a newspaper office.

"A fine set-up young fellow, Burton," St. John continued, lowering his voice and looking maliciously into his friend's eyes; "a boy to be proud of. He could not be your own by any chance, unless—— Well, you need not blush and fidget, I meant no harm."

"I'm glad you like the boy, Grayle. I want you to help him."

Shrewdness triumphed for a moment over good-nature in those keen grey eyes. His thought was—"What, another of those gentlemen amateurs who are the curse of a newspaper office?"

"Don't look so glum, Grayle. It's not much I want from you, and you need not do it if you don't like. I think you knew the young fellow's father—Festus Daly?"

"Very well indeed," replied Grayle emphatically; "better perhaps than he knew himself. We were friends so far as a butterfly and a bumble-bee can be friends. I was making honey and he was eating it. But if this is a chip of the old block, why bring him here? He has come to the wrong shop for amusement, and as for work—he's no true son of his father if he ever makes or saves a farthing."

"Don't be too hard on his father, Grayle. He has paid the last debt."

"It's the first he has ever paid, I dare swear," muttered Grayle, but not unkindly. "Poor Festus, poor fellow, he had his good points. If he wasn't just, he was generous; if he never paid a debt to a dun, he never refused a loan to a friend. For his sake and for yours, Burton, I will do the little I can for the boy. He looks as if he had the right stuff in him. But he'll need a deal of tempering before he is hardened to our work. It's a rough test on pluck and perseverance. Do you think he'll stand it?"

"I know he'll stand it. Give him a chance. That's all he asks, and that's all I ask for him. May I introduce him?"

"Certainly."

"I knew your father pretty well, Mr. Daly," said St. John Grayle kindly. "So you want to be a

newspaper hack like the rest of us. It's hard work, mind. It's d—d hard work."

"I don't care how hard, sir, if I can earn my bread at it."

He thought more of Grace's bread than his own, but he did not say so.

"What can you do?" said Grayle shortly, with an abrupt change of manner.

"Very little, sir, I'm afraid," said Gerald shyly. He had not the faintest notion what he might be expected to do.

"He took the first place at Clongowes," broke in Dr. Burton. "He was their best all-round boy at books and games, and the captain of the eleven."

Grayle smiled.

"Have you ever written anything?"

"I got the medal for English composition and English poetry."

"You won't find much poetry about this place, I'm afraid. You don't know anything about shorthand, of course?"

"A little."

"What do you mean by a little? Can you take a speaker down?"

"If he's not too fast."

"Well, we'll try. No time like the present. There's a pencil and note-book there on the table. You've got a knife? All right. Point the pencil on both sides for fear of accidents. We'll start when you are ready."

He took up a newspaper, and turning to a report of a speech of his own the day before at the Corporation, began reading very slowly as it seemed.

But slow reading, as every shorthand writer knows to his cost, is quicker than quick speaking. St. John Grayle slipped away quietly at the rate of 150 words a minute, and Gerald had to strain every nerve as he raced after him on the note-book, always half a sentence behind. Dr. Burton anxiously watched the pencil point glide over the note-book, leaving a trail of hieroglyphics.

The pace grew too hot for Gerald. He met St. John Grayle's eye with a mute appeal for mercy. With a good-humoured smile St. John slacked speed a little to let him come abreast. Then they galloped together through the peroration, and Gerald was only half-a-dozen words behind at the finish.

When the pencil stopped a few seconds after the speaker, St. John took the note-book from his hand and glanced at it critically.

"Neat enough," he muttered to himself; "the lad ought to do." Then out aloud, "Can you read it?"

"I'll try, sir, if you wish."

He was quaking with nervousness, and for a moment or so could make nothing of the rows of crooks and curves and lines and dots that seemed so much alike.

"Take your time, my boy," said St. John, kindly, and gave him the first few words to start him. Even then he stumbled at the start. But when he once

got into the swing of it, his rare memory stood his friend and helped him over many an illegible symbol. The short, vigorous sentences, the strong, clear common-sense of the speech, made his task all the easier. Gerald read well. St. John nodded approval to his own points, to which the young earnest voice seemed to give new force.

"By God! I didn't know it was so good a speech," he said as Gerald rolled out the peroration without a hitch.

Then Dr. Burton winked an encouraging wink at Gerald, who was pale with excitement.

"Very well done, indeed, Mr. Daly," said St. John. "I think you'll do. For your father's sake, and for my friend Dr. Burton's sake, and, if you will let me say so, for your own sake as well, I hope you'll do. It's not much of a chance, mind you. It means hard work, with plenty of it. It means no pay for some time, and small pay—it may be—for a long time. If you don't suit the job, you mustn't mind being told so pretty plainly. It is not every sort of material we can hammer into a good newspaper man."

"I'll do my best, sir, and won't grumble."

"Come along with me at once, and I'll make you free of the place if the Chief Reporter hasn't left. You'll find McQuirk a very decent kind of fellow, as hard in the shell but as sweet in the kernel as a ripe nut. He'll keep your nose to the grindingstone, but he'll treat you well if he finds you know your work and do it."

They went down a long, narrow, ramshackle passage, with little numbered doors on either side like a shabby hotel. "Leader writers' room," "Special wire," "Editor," were under the numbers.

He stopped at the end of the passage at a door with a battered zinc plate and on it in half-obliterated black letters, "Reporters' room." St. John turned the handle, without knocking, and walked right in.

It looked a particularly dilapidated school-room, given over to the tender mercies of particularly mischievous school-boys. The long desk was knife-scarred and ink-stained, and strewn with pens, pencils, reporting "slips," and newspapers, especially newspapers. They were everywhere: floor, chairs, table and desk were littered with them; old papers and new, for the most part, with rectangular pieces here and there cut clean out with a penknife. The walls were adorned with what may be called combination cuts. Half-a-dozen illustrations combined to produce a single effect. The head of some prominent statesman, neatly attached to the body of a circus girl, smiled benevolently on an illustrious colleague in the costume of a clown. A Methodist minister stood upon his clerical head, and a famous Protestant bishop, in full episcopal rig-out, with muscular arms and boxing gloves profanely appended, faced the champion of England in the ring with a smile of placid assurance.

There were four men in the room, scattered as

promiscuously as the newspapers over the chairs, tables, and desks, and chaffing each other noisily.

The chaff ceased abruptly as St. John Grayle came in.

"Good-day, Caine, good-day. Good-day, Guilder; good-day, Royster," nodding familiarly to the three men, who sauntered to the door and disappeared. "McQuirk," he went on in a low voice to the fourth, who stood at his desk with a tattered dog-eared diary in front of him, "here's a young fellow that wants to be a reporter." McQuirk snorted; he was not keen on amateurs. "Oh! I know all that," said St. John, answering the snort, "but I think he has the right stuff in him. He can do a bit of shorthand, and says he is not afraid of hard work. Give him a fair chance, will you, like a decent fellow. I will be very glad if you can make a press-man of him, and if any man living can, you can. Good-day, Mr. Daly, I will look you up again later on." Then he ran his arm into Dr. Burton's, and carried him off.

McQuirk stood looking at the bashful young fellow before him, with a grim pucker on his shrewd mouth and a kindly twinkle in his keen eye. He was a small man. His head scarcely reached over Gerald's shoulder, but in experience and knowledge of the world he was a giant to him.

Gerald stood before him with unaffected reverence, waiting his judgment.

"Well, young man," he said at last, "and what can you do?"

"My best," said Gerald, simply.

"That's not good enough. You must do a deuced sight better than your best if you want to get along on a newspaper. Come along and have a cup of coffee and a cake, and we'll talk the matter over."

They did talk over that cup of coffee—at least one of them did. Quaint humorous talk that was worth listening to, talk garnished by miraculous mimicry. By a tone of a man's voice or a trick of his face McQuirk caught his likeness with a quickness and truth to life of a snap-shot photo.

"What did St. John try you at?"

"A bit of one of his own speeches."

"Ugh! That was a ticklish job; how did you get on?"

"Pretty well, I think. He looked pleased when I read it."

"This kind of thing." He spouted a bit of St. John's speech. It was St. John himself speaking. The wave of the hand, the droop of the eyelids, every turn of the voice.

Gerald laughed out loud. The dignity of the Chief Reporter was not proof against the frank flattery of that laugh.

"Wait till you have to do St. John in solid earnest," he said, "and you won't laugh. To have to patch pieces into the jagged sentences, and then get paid for your trouble in profanity when he comes to paint the proofs of your report."

"Paint the proofs?"

"Aye, to tone down the strong colours and touch in the green background. Can you take down what a speaker intends to say, young man?"

"If he says it."

"But if he does not say it?"

"I'm afraid I cannot."

"Then you won't do for St. John yet a bit. He wants his thoughts taken down in shorthand, or rather what he wishes the public to think are his thoughts."

Thereupon McQuirk gave Gerald a humorously fantastic account of the duties and requirements of a reporter's life, till the young fellow was half-minded to run away from the attempt in sheer despair. The chief with great skill and ease convinced him that he had not one single quality necessary for success as a reporter.

That was a way of his. It was good, he said, to knead the dough before you made the bread. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed the poor boy's cheek pale and flush and pale again.

Then at last he gave him a word of rough encouragement.

"There is no knowing what you can do until you try, as the man said when he murdered his mother-in-law. Half-past ten sharp at the office to-morrow morning, and I'll fit you with a job. O Reservoir, as we say in Paree." With a wide smile and bow and shrug of a burlesque Frenchman, he parted with his bewildered pupil.

Grace saw her brother at the corner of the street, and welcomed him at the door, with eager inquiry in her bright eyes.

His eyes reassured her.

"Oh! I'm so glad," she said softly, "there is a chance for you. That's all I ever asked for. Don't dare to look as if you are afraid of yourself, but sit right down there in the light—it's two hours yet to dinner—and tell me all about it, every word."

She pushed him into the comfortable arm-chair, where the light fell full on his face, and dropping into a low seat in front, listened with all her eyes.

They talked of it before dinner and after dinner, and well into the night, and she was full of hope and he of fear. Neither altered their first opinion by one hair's breadth. He was certain he would be dismissed in a week, and she that he would be an editor within a year.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE PRESS

"An art
Half mental, half mechanical, that taught
To reproduce the thoughts of other men
And patch the tattered raiment of their speech."

AFTER all those months of aimless wandering it was a comfort to Gerald to have at least somewhere definite to go. Yet he felt like an impostor as he started out next morning for the offices of the *Free Press*. To write for a newspaper seemed an impossible ambition. Even to have one's name in the newspaper was a sublime distinction. He still preserved the paper, much worn at the folds, which gave that glowing account of the cricket match, when as captain of his college eleven he had carried his bat for three figures against the "Phœnix."

The newspaper was for him the voice of the oracle glorified by the glory of print. Newspaper men were to his vague imagining superior and mysterious beings, who scattered printed wisdom broadcast through the world.

As he entered the old ramshackle room, he felt dazed at finding himself suddenly in the very heart of this mysterious machine.

McQuirk nodded to him as he came in, a nod that said, "I'll attend to you later on," and he got away bashfully to a corner of the room where he stood silent with eyes and ears wide open. There were seven or eight in the room, bright young fellows for the most part, who lounged and chatted, waiting for their "marking."

The only busy man there was McQuirk. He had got a battered old scribbling diary before him, "the book of fate," his reporters called it, in which after each man's name he set down his work for the day, fitting the burthen to the back with impartial nicety and giving to each the work he could do best.

"Gibson," he said, "you're down for Queen's Bench and Common Pleas. There is a breach of promise in the list, but I don't think it will be on to-day. O'Reilly, you do the rest of the Courts; you should squeeze them into a column unless something very special turns up. I want you to pick me up a bit of Professor Mooney's lecture at eight. Here are a couple of tickets; you can bring your girl,—they put out the light now and then for the experiments.

"Will you do the Police Courts, Geraghty, and a tramway men's meeting at twelve to-night? You are on night town, and you can look in on your way to the police offices. Cut it down unless there is a row.

"Murphy, you and O'Hagan are down for the half-

yearly meeting of the Melesian Bank; it is likely to be a bit noisy as the dividends are down, so I have given you nothing else. Don't let it run to more than four columns, but see the old man before you write up.

"Malley, your tot is the Corporation, and a par of the Bricklayers' Ball. There was a gay and festive bricklayer, one of the committee, here last night with a pack of cards, 'hoping as how we'd see our way to a full report.'" For a moment in voice and gesture the chief was a "gay and festive bricklayer" himself.

"Moriarty, you're booked for the meeting at Cork; start by the one train. You will get the railway passes downstairs. If it runs to any length, black with the local man."

The room emptied as the "chief" spoke, till only two men were left.

"You'll do the Horticultural performance, of course, Guilder," he said. "The old man wants it extra superfine."

"So he told me last night. Viceroyalty is to be there, and all the castle snobs and snobesses. 'Do me a verbatim report, Guilder,' he said. Can you give us a wrinkle, chief, how to take down dahlias in shorthand or transcribe roses? Talking of roses, I'm promised the full of my top hat of prize-bloom for my best girl."

"By Jove, Guilder," broke in Caine, "you are a howler and no mistake. You'll make the flowers wither on their stalks from sheer envy and burst up the

show. Look at him, Mack. Isn't he distinctly precious? The 'lilies in their glory' weren't turned out like Jem. That's scripture, isn't it? It's gospel truth, anyhow."

"A regular dandy-lion," said McQuirk, grinning.

"Which liberal shepherds call a grosser name," quoted Caine.

"Envy, my dear boys, envy," said Guilder complacently, twirling his moustache, "try not to show it so plainly. You are happier in the state of life to which you are called, if you only knew it. I sometimes almost wish I was as ugly as one of you fellows. Beauty has its responsibilities. I feel it a matter of conscience to give the girls an occasional treat. But what brings you out at this unearthly hour, Nick?" he went on, turning to the leader-writer, Caine; "you look as dull as an owl in the daylight."

"Oh! I have a game of my own on, Master James. I have done my little tot for to-night for the largest circulation in Ireland; the genuine thing, a regular kingdom-shaker; I guess it will make our friend William of Germany squirm when he reads it at breakfast."

He pulled out the bundle of slips as he spoke. But Guilder fled in affected horror from what he profanely called a deluge of muck, and Caine pursued, threatening him with the manuscript, leaving poor Gerald quite dumfounded at the levity of those leaders of public opinion.

The voice of the Chief Reporter brought his

thoughts up with a jerk. McQuirk had been eying him sharply before he spoke.

"Tell me," he said, "why do you want to be a reporter; fun?"

"No, necessity."

"That's the only excuse. The man that would be a reporter for fun would go to hell for diversion. Have you ever written anything for a newspaper?"

Gerald felt very much as if he had asked him "have you ever been Prime Minister?" He made a shy disclaimer.

"Can you write shorthand?"

"A little."

"And read it?"

"I find that ever so much harder."

"So I should think. How many words a minute can you do?"

"About one hundred and thirty."

"Humph! You must put on another twenty before you can tackle the slowest speaker verbatim. But that will do well enough for rough and tumble work. Let me see where I can put you on a trial job. There's a case of Jones *v.* Jameson in the Rolls Court—will you see what you can do with it? Boil it down to a readable column or so. You know the Four Courts, of course. No? well, I am going down that way myself to make some inquiries at the Hanaper Office, and I'll take you in tow."

As he walked down the Quay with the little man whom he could have swung round his head, Gerald

felt like a two-year-old baby out for an airing with his nurse, so completely was he subdued by his own ignorance and the other's mastery of the life he was entering on. His simplicity tickled the chief into good-humour. Kindly advice was freely ladled out to the novice as they walked, seasoned by quaint chaff and preposterous stories of a reporter's life, told with a preternatural gravity that insisted on credence.

"There's your stand," the chief said, as he walked the bewildered Gerald into the great circular high-domed hall of the Four Courts, and pointed to a door with "Queen's Bench" on it. "Squeeze yourself in amongst the reporters, right down on the seat under the bench. Say you belong to the *Free Press* if they bother you, and threaten me on them. And now in parting, my dear young friend,"—here his voice assumed a tone of paternal anxiety—"allow me to give you one word of advice which I always offer to beginners on their entrance into our noble profession: Don't introduce the word 'Mesopotamia' into your reports oftener than you find absolutely necessary."

Having thus solemnly delivered himself, he turned away with a grin of delight. "I have thrown the young fellow in out of his depth," he said to himself, as he sauntered off, "but if he has the right stuff in him he'll learn to swim all the quicker."

Very much indeed out of his depth Gerald felt as he made his first entrance to the law court, bewildered by the strangeness of everything about him. He was

lucky enough to find a vacant place at the corner of the seat under the bench, and he slipped into it, blushing furiously and feeling like an impostor. Then out came his note-book and double-pointed pencil. The case was half over when he got in, and he had not the faintest notion what it was all about. At the moment he entered, counsel was arguing a law point of which Gerald could make neither head nor tail. After scrambling along for a while through a mere jumble of words, he gave up in despair. Then looking furtively around he noticed that none of the reporters were taking notes, but were writing away for bare life, transcribing the notes already taken and passing out the slips two or three at a time to the messenger boys in waiting.

The law argument was decided in five curt words from the judge, who refused even to make a note of the objection.

Half-way through counsel's speech for the defence, Gerald began to have a glimmering of what the case was all about. But he had not yet mastered the first element of a reporter's art. He could not follow the words and the sense together; his notes took his mind from the meaning, or the meaning took his mind from the notes. He grew hopelessly confused.

Very different work was this from practising shorthand with a good-natured reader who turned off steam when the pace was too hot. Counsel had no mercy. His speech always broke into more rapid spurts, just as the pencil in his stiffening fingers

began to fail. It was the difference between trying to catch a tame donkey and a zebra.

The pace grew still hotter when the speech ended, and the evidence began. The quick flashes of question and answer between witness and cross-examining counsel, more rapid than the most rapid speech, drove Gerald to despair. He missed the question or he missed the answer. He could never catch both together. He didn't know the names, and he was too shy to ask. Every moment the confusion grew more confounded. He was dimly conscious that a big, black-bearded, brilliant man, whom the judge called "the learned serjeant," dominated the case, cajoled the jury, and made fun of the witnesses. But Gerald did not enjoy the fun in the least. The sudden roars of laughter that shook the Court as some unhappy witness tumbled into the serjeant's trap set his nerves all ajar.

How he envied the seasoned press-men beside him who took the whole thing so easily, enjoying the fun, and even exchanging little jokes of their own, as they scribbled shorthand and longhand alternately, keeping all the time easily abreast with the case. One good-looking young fellow about his own age was the special object of his envy and despair in the brief intervals in which he noted his laughing face.

Hour by hour the case drifted and babbled along with relentless speed, and Gerald's pencil toiled after it in vain. His nerves were all in an irritating tangle, his mind refused to find the shorthand symbols, and

his aching fingers to form them. It still wanted half-an-hour of the time for adjournment and he felt he must collapse utterly, when relief came at last.

"I think, my lord, with your permission," said the sergeant, "I would desire to reserve the few words I intend to say to the jury till to-morrow. It is now within twenty minutes of the usual time for adjourning."

"Very well, Mr. Sergeant," said the bench. "We adjourn to eleven o'clock to-morrow," and the crier's "God save the Queen" closed the performance for the day.

Dizziness and nausea came upon Gerald with the reaction of the long strain. He was so faint he staggered for a moment when he found himself out of the close hot court in the cool air of the street. Above all he had a sickening sense of utter failure and incompetence. He never could remember how he got home.

Grace read the misery in his face like a written page.

"They would not give you a trial," she said.

"Worse than that, Grace—far worse, they did give me a trial and I broke down hopelessly. I cannot even attempt the work that other fellows do so easily. That's the maddening part of it."

Grace smiled superior.

"What any other fellows can do, you can do, Gerald. You cannot get that out of my head. I wish I could get it into yours." She picked up the note-book

which he had flung on the table despairingly, and began to turn over the leaves. "This looks very nice and neat and clean," she said.

"Then it looks a lie. It is a jumble of nonsense. It is my first chance and my last." He jumped from the chair and began walking up and down. "I'm good for nothing, Grace, nothing in the wide world. I did my best; I did more than my best. I fought it out to the very last, but I know when I'm licked."

But Grace didn't know it and would not know it. She had the precious and special feminine gift of comforter. By dinner time she coaxed him back to something like good-humour; her cheerfulness giving him courage.

But his courage oozed out through his pen's point when later on he came to tackle his notes. They were worse than he thought, a mere jumble of fragments of sentences. They were like the scraps of paper from which the literature of *Laputa* was compounded by the turning of a handle. "On these papers," we read in the memoirs of the immortal Gulliver, "were written all the words of their language in their several moods, tenses, and declensions, but without any order." Such were his notes. Question and answer ran into each other with no hint of a name between to tell who questioned or who answered. Gerald squeezed his forehead with both hands, and strained after the meaning with an effort that was pain.

For a little while Grace sat apart quietly watching

while she made pretence to read. But she saw that his nerves were so overwrought that her very presence worried him, so with an excuse that she was tired, she slipped quietly to her own room, there to lie awake for hours in the dead changeless silence that was her life's portion.

All night Gerald struggled in single combat with the dogged hieroglyphics. In his previous practice he had been able to catch the meaning as well as the words, and was helped by a memory wonderfully quick and true, the context forcing the right word on him as a card conjurer forces a card.

But here his memory could get no hold on a slippery jumble of broken sentences. He had to puzzle out each symbol as a separate conundrum. His brain ached, straining into void space for the word or thought he wanted. To the last moment of his life he would remember the misery of that night. He had alternate cold and hot fits of hopeless apathy or fierce impatience. Twice he jumped up and flung the note-book on the ground and trampled on it. But he picked it up humbly a moment afterwards, and smoothing the crushed pages, began again with dogged determination. Now and again, at rare intervals, he came upon a sequent passage, over which his eye and mind and pen travelled, smoothly rolling them off like twine from a ball. But just as hope and confidence began to cheer him a little, he was pulled up sharply by a hard knot. About two o'clock the want of sleep told on him in the strangest fashion.

While he puzzled his brain over a tantalizing sign that refused to deliver up its meaning, something in his mental machinery would suddenly give way, and he dropped off to sleep and to dream, waking up the next moment with his mind as bright and active as before.

So working and sleeping in fits and starts, he struggled on to the end.

At four his work was done as far as he could do it. Not daring even to read his transcript lest he should be tempted back into bewildering puzzledom, he put the MS. from him ruefully and stole up to bed in the grey dawn.

Grace, poor girl, was wide awake and waiting his coming, lapped in the profound silence which closed round her life and let no sound pass. She saw the gleam of his candle at last through the chink of her door, which she had left ajar on purpose, then with a contented little sigh she dropped off to sleep.

When he came down next morning, Grace was before him in the room, and his MS. lying ready, neatly wrapped in brown paper. The very sight of it gave him a shiver. It brought back all the misery of his failure and forebodings. But he had to put a bold face on it during breakfast to cheer his sister, and ended by almost cheering himself.

"Good-bye, Grace," he said at the door, "and wish me luck. Perhaps they will give me another chance, and an easier one next time. It cannot well be harder," he added to himself as he walked briskly to the office.

The reporter's room was empty when he got there. But a moment or two afterwards the chief came in. He picked up a newspaper from the half-dozen or so that lay scattered on the large rough desk, and dived into it at once in search of the items for his day's programme. Then he passed rapidly from one paper to another, his quick eye noting the announcements of meetings, and other notable functions for which he would have to provide reporters. All the time he kept scribbling curt notes of the dates and particulars in his blotted and tattered diary.

Gerald waited silently in a very agony of nervous suspense. It seemed a very long time—it was in reality a very short time, before the busy "chief" looked up and saw him.

"Well," he said kindly enough, "how did you like your first dose of the Courts? Wasn't the big Sergeant fine? I looked in for a minute while he was playing the red-hot devil with one of the witnesses. You were to try and do me something of it, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir! I have it here," and he put the big roll of MS. into the other's hands. "I'm afraid you will find it a little disappointing."

The chief smiled sardonically as he cut the string and unrolled the paper, yet not without a touch of pity for the other's simplicity.

He turned over half-a-dozen leaves here and there, just glancing at them, and then looked at the final page.

"You took a big dose and no mistake," he said,

weighing the roll in his hand. "I asked you to do a specimen column or so. There are five and a half columns in this thing if there's a line."

"I didn't know how much went to a column, so I tried to take it all as well as I could."

"And sat up all night to write it?" He looked at him sharply but kindly. "Well, I see you don't mind work anyhow. That's right. A shirker never comes to anything. It was my fault. I forgot you were beginning reporting at the beginning; on the first of January in the year one."

He bundled the copy into its brown paper and handed it back. "Keep it," he said grimly, "as a memento of a very pleasant evening! It will give you a good laugh whenever—if ever—you get to be a reporter. How do you think that kind of thing with as many blanks as a German lottery would do for a newspaper? My dear young friend, reporting is the art of being all there. There is no demand in a newspaper office for blanks. There is no leisure to go home and write copperplate. Pitch a reporter down the chimney in the middle of a meeting, he'll have his copy written up before it's over, for the evening edition. The newspaper goes to press though the world goes to blazes. On the day of General Judgment we will have a special edition out with a verbatim report of the sentences."

The chief's banter had a purpose in it. There was in his voice the half conscious condescension which a man who knows a thing will—no matter what it

is—use to the man who does not. But he relaxed into a grim smile at Gerald's blank dismay.

"Don't be down-hearted, young man," he said, "all wheat must go through the mill before it comes out flour. The mill and stones are a bit rough on you just at first, but you will come through all right, never fear."

Gerald hardly knew whether to be disgusted or delighted at the scant attention his unhappy manuscript had received.

He was glad that its discrepancies had escaped the chief's microscope, though he felt that the horrible labour of the night had been absolutely wasted. But he had no time for words, hardly time for thought, for at that moment the reporters—eight or nine of them—came bustling into the room, and there broke out a babble of voices at once.

"Let me off light, chief," cried one, "I am only back by the night mail and I'm dead beat."

"You might have caught the limited at three," retorted the chief, "and written up as you came along, and saved the office the cost of a wire. You weren't wanted at the banquet; half-a-dozen lines from the local would have done. You're down for a couple of Courts. I don't know of anything in either, you can double them up early. Pick me up half a column of a temperance lecture at the Ancient Concert Rooms at four, and you can get home to tea."

The man grumbled a bit about the temperance

lecture being tacked on to his tot, but finding the chief inflexible, he subsided and strolled out with a chum who was marked for the important case in the Queen's Bench over which Gerald had broken his heart the day before.

"You got stuck at the execution, Bill," the chief said to another man, "you missed the dying words. However you piled up the agony handsomely on the scaffold. I think our account is the best in spite of the stick."

"I was a bit shaken by the colour of the poor devil's face," said the reporter. "It was as grey as a cigar ash."

"All right, old man, better luck next time. I've let you off light to-day."

So with the rest. Each man's "marking" was duly posted by the chief in his diary. One reporter who got what the auctioneers call "a miscellaneous lot,"—a funeral, a flower show, an inquest, and a "stiff" paragraph of the "Gaiety" theatre—growled disconsolately. He was offered a "swop" of "night" town, but he promptly declined. There was a "big fire," he said, "overdue."

All this jargon was Greek to Gerald. He looked and listened in silent bewilderment, quite unnoticed, till the last "marking" was completed, and the last reporter gone.

The chief gravely set himself down for "notices," as usual. "Notices" meant anything or nothing; generally nothing. When the chief was chaffed on

the subject of this marking he would say he liked "to keep his eagle eye all over the place."

"You might have a try at this lecture," he said to Gerald when the distribution was complete. "It's Table-turning, or Electricity, or old red sandstone, I'm not sure which, but Professor Caughton has always something to say for himself. It's good for half a column anyhow. Here's the ticket. Four o'clock sharp. I have marked Mr. Cooper, but I have asked him to let you do it, if you can. He'll doctor up your copy if it's not incurable. You know Mr. Cooper? the man with the pointed beard and the talking hands." With a brisk Frenchy gesture of his hands and shoulders, the chief individualized and identified Mr. Cooper for Gerald.

"About eight pages of your ordinary writing will make half a column. Come straight here from the lecture. Cooper will meet you. He's as decent a fellow as steps in shoe-leather; he'll help you if he can."

Gerald found the lecture pleasanter work than the Courts. There was only one man to look after and he was intelligible. The chief was right in his central guess. Electricity was the subject. The lecture was simple and fascinating as a fairy tale. At first Gerald tried a break-neck shorthand gallop in pursuit, and got left in the thick of some technical words of which he had to think out the symbols. Then his common-sense helped him. He trusted his memory a little. He let his mind follow the words as well as the

pencil. The pauses for experiments, the breaks for applause gave him breathing space. His nervousness vanished. He was able, because he thought himself able. He left the room with the pleasant feeling that he had caught the lecture and held it within the covers of his note-book.

He got back in hot haste to the office. There was no Mr. Cooper there. He did not expect him; he did not want him. He hoped to have got on well with his report before the other's arrival. So he settled down at once to work, clear and confident, as if some of the electricity had got into his blood and—baulked at the very first sentence. He felt it open country before him if he could get over that first fence. It seemed such an easy thing. It was only to get the name of the lecturer, the subject, and the place, into one clear sentence; yet for the life of him he could not manage it. He began a dozen times and tore up as many slips of paper. He walked up and down the room, raging at his own dulness. The lecture was in his book, ready to flow if he could only get this cursed cork out.

Then suddenly and without effort the sentence shaped itself, and the rest flowed freely until he had covered his prescribed eight pages without effort. He pulled up suddenly and found he was still at the very beginning of the lecture. He was amazed to find how little fitted into half a column. He tore up these slips too, and began again. He tried hard to squeeze the substance of the lecture into the pre-

scribed space. By way of abbreviation he wrote closer and smaller. At last he got what he knew to be a good clear summary into ten pages.

Then for the first time he had leisure to feel hungry. He looked at his watch and found he had been nearly three hours and a half at work. It was after eight o'clock; and still no Mr. Cooper.

Truth was that Mr. Cooper had forgotten all about him. He had been to the lecture, left before it was over, gone home, had his dinner and smoke, written up his summary, half a column to the line in little more than half an hour, and walked in with it to the printer at about eight o'clock.

By the merest accident as he was leaving he looked into the reporters' room and found Gerald.

"Hullo! my boy," he cried with a sudden pang of recollection, "I hope I have not kept you waiting. You quite slipped my memory. Been to the lecture?"

Gerald nodded, and offered him his written slips.

"I'm exceedingly sorry, but I'm afraid it's too late. I have just given my copy out. They have begun to distribute by this."

The look of bitter disappointment in the boy's face touched him. A burly, big-hearted Corkman was Mr. Cooper, with a southern vivacity of voice and gesture.

"Don't be down-hearted, Mr. ——"

"Daly."

"Mr. Daly, let's see what you have done, anyhow."

He glanced over the first half-dozen pages, and then without a word bolted for the printing-room, and came back in a minute or so with different slips in his hand, which he deliberately tore up and scattered on the floor.

"I have stopped mine, and given out yours," he exclaimed when he got his breath. "Yours is by long chalks the best, and you'd naturally like to see it in print. I felt that way myself when I was beginning. I see you know something about this educated thunder and lightning. I wish I did. There is no kind of knowledge but comes in handy to a reporter. With practice and patience you'll do, Mr. Daly; take my word for it you will do famously."

Gerald walked home with head in the air, and feet that hardly touched the pavement. The kindly praise of the experienced reporter was very sweet to him, and sweeter still the thought of finding his own handiwork in print in the morning.

Grace, frightened at his long absence, leaped up from her chair with a cry of delight when he touched her shoulder. In a moment she read hope in his face, and kissed back congratulations before a word was spoken. He ate his postponed dinner with keen relish. There was a great treat in store for him. He was restless, excited, unable to sit still for a moment, until Grace, with a pretty air of mystery, put a neat brown-paper parcel in his hands. He cut the string and drew out a handsome volume, resplendent in crimson and gold binding.

"It's *Treasure Island*," she cried exultingly, "the book the newspapers are full of, the book you were longing to read. I want you to forget your worries. A good old-fashioned pleasant evening as we used to have together at home, will do you all the good in the world."

"I'm down-right angry with you," retorted Gerald, but eyes and voice gave the words the lie. "How could you be so extravagant? I won't read a word, to punish you."

"Now, don't growl. You could not keep from it if you tried."

She was right. He made believe to read the newspaper, but she took the book and set it on the table close to his elbow. A temptation went out from it, and after a few moments' ostentatious resistance he plunged headlong into the fascinating story, while Grace smiled triumphantly over her needlework.

Gerald lost all his troubles in the story, while half consciously his literary taste was charmed with the strength and grace of the style. The boy's spirit in him was captivated by the adventure. It was all real to him. He was out on the sea or away in the island with the people of the book. He knew them, listened to them, lived their lives and shared their dangers, while his own petty worries were clean forgotten in the excitement of their deadly perils and hair-breadth escapes. He read well into the night, powerless to stop. A good story had for him the fascination of alcohol for a drunkard. At length with a

wrench of his will he shut the book sharp, just as that clean, fascinating sea cook "Silver" finished his gruesome murder with crutch and knife.

Even in his dreams the troubles of the treasure-seekers took the edge off his own. It was the first time since he came to Dublin that he enjoyed complete oblivion from the long monotonous strain of anxiety. He was brighter for it and more hopeful at least as he came down to breakfast next morning, humming a gay air, and looking, Grace thought, more like his old boyish self than he had been since he left Loughile. He caught up the copy of the *Free Press* that lay on the breakfast table and opened it trembling with eagerness. From page to page he went, his eye searching for the heading, "Lecture on Electricity," and finding it nowhere. He tried back, scanning each column up and down anxiously—all to no purpose.

Then his old despondency came back with a rush. Vague forebodings troubled him. His report had plainly been discarded as impossible. Cooper was wrong about it. But then, why hadn't Cooper's own report gone in?

He remembered he had seen the slips torn. The paper had lost the invaluable lecture through his incompetence. He worked himself into quite a fever of excitement, and could not keep still for a moment.

Full twenty minutes before his time he found himself at the office, and kept walking up and down the long empty room, expecting he knew not what. The chief

was the first in, and with a curt good-morning to Gerald, set to work on his marking book. Then the others dropped in by ones and twos, nodding to him good-naturedly. He waited in feverish anxiety, the babel of many voices jarring meaninglessly on his ears.

The chief went steadily through his work, scattering his staff through city and country. When at last they had the room to themselves he turned to Gerald.

"Your report of the lecture was first-class, Cooper tells me. It was squeezed out by the Ballygaddy meeting, but I think it is in the over-matter."

Gerald did not know what the "over-matter" meant, and did not like to ask. The chief went on:

"Drop down to the Police Court, and see if you can pick up a case or two that we can use." He spoke as if cases could be picked up like mushrooms. "Boil them down to a paragraph, and get your names and facts right. A boy will look you up for copy for the evening paper. Here are some slips"—handing him a bundle of loose pages of coarse scribbling paper. "Mind you only write on one side or the 'comps' will have your blood."

Gerald took the slips, wondering where the Police Courts were; how cases were to be picked up and boiled; who were the 'comps.' By much inquiry he got to the Police Court at last. In spite of the close fœtid smell, and the mass of miserable humanity in the dock and round it, he thought the inferior court an improvement on the superior from a reporter's

point of view. He was surprised to find that though the business was well on the reporters' box was empty. So he settled down with pencil and paper to catch his cases and boil them.

There was a long monotonous recital of the morning charges in progress. "Drunk and disorderly, your worship, and making use of obscene and profane language," from the constable. "Five shillings or seven days," from the magistrate. So the dreary litany ran.

Gerald waited nervously for something to try his pencil on. His whole future in life seemed to depend —perhaps it did depend—on this little bit of commonplace routine work, which to the ordinary reporter is as simple as paring his pencil. For the last few days he had studied the style of the newspaper reports with the same admiration and envy that Brougham studied Demosthenes, and in the same spirit of humble emulation. He never dreamt of testing it by any literary standard. It was newspaper writing; that was enough for him.

The miserable litany closed at last. A professional "drunk" was pushed out of the dock, and a professional burglar pushed into it. Gerald fell to work pell-mell upon the case. He was scribbling away vigorously in shorthand, putting down every word he could catch, when a reporter—a good-looking young fellow with quick, dark eyes—dropped quietly into the box beside him. For a minute or two he looked curiously at Gerald, whose pencil kept gallop-

ing over the paper, booking every detail of the dull case.

"Got a special on it?" he said at last in a brief lull of the business while one witness left the box and another entered it.

Gerald looked up surprised. It was a very pleasant voice with a friendly tone in it.

"I don't know what a special is," he answered.

"Don't know what a special is? I hope you won't be long so. But why are you taking a 'verbatim' of a dead and alive case like this?"

"For the newspaper." He forgot for the moment there was more than one newspaper in the world.

"What newspaper?" persisted the other, with the frank curiosity of a fellow-craftsman which had nothing offensive in it.

"The *Free Press*," said Gerald, reddening. It was so pleasant to be taken for a regular reporter.

"Oh! the *Free Press;* a new hand? Well, you could not have come to a better schoolmaster. The chief will make a reporter of you, if any man can. Whether you will live to thank him for it is another matter. He can be as rough and hard as a whetstone, but he grinds sharp. He is a down-right good fellow at bottom besides. There is nothing on here to-day. Put what you have written into a couple of sticks. I'll get a case or two off the charge-sheet to keep up the head. Then we will double it up. I'll black what I get for you and the other fellows."

"A couple of sticks?" said Gerald, utterly bewildered.

"Oh! beg pardon—printers' sticks. Squeeze it into a paragraph, I mean; it's not worth more." In a moment he had got the official charge-sheets from the sergeant. He sandwiched his slips with three sheets of carbonized black manifolding paper, and scribbled away like fury, making his pencil gallop over the paper. Gerald was full of envy of the gay young fellow, no older than himself, who worked reporting miracles so easily. The careless facility with which the work was done enhanced his despair of doing it. The contrast of the other's case with his own futile toil took all the heart out of him.

He plodded hopelessly through his voluminous shorthand notes, puzzled where and how to begin.

"Drop the notes altogether," said his new friend, looking up for a moment from his work. "Get the names and addresses and sentences down right; just give a word or two of what the case was about, and there you are. It's as simple as kiss hands. You need not go wading through shorthand for that. Look alive like a decent fellow."

"First-class, copper fastened, A1 at Lloyd's," he said good-naturedly, when Gerald a few minutes later timidly handed him what he had written. "There's nothing else," he went on; "I've asked the sergeant. There's your messenger; give him the copy, and the other fellows can get it if they want it out of the

evening newspaper. Mind, we've doubled up; nothing more out of this court, even if the Lord Chief Justice is remanded for manslaughter. I'm off for the day. What about a game of billiards if you have nothing else to do?"

Gerald nodded. He rather fancied himself at billiards, and was not sorry to get the chance of showing his friends he was not an all-round duffer. At the door of the Court they ran across two other reporters coming in hurriedly.

"Anything here?" asked one, laconically.

"It's all right," Gerald's friend answered. "We've doubled up. One case; will be in the evening; and I've blacked the rest for you. Come along. We're off for a game of pool."

They got a private table in a private room in a quiet lane off Dame Street, almost opposite the Castle, and were shown up by the proprietor himself with the deference due to "gentlemen of the Press."

They had not played a minute when it was plain that the three reporters were under the average and Gerald well above it. He won the first three-penny pool with the loss of one life; the second he won without losing a life at all. Then he took on his first friend, whose name was Joe Bird, at billiards, giving him fifty in a hundred, and ran out the game when the other was eighty-nine.

The little triumph did the boy good, warming him out of his shyness. He found it very pleasant to be accepted as one of the guild. The reporters, for their

parts, took their beating good-humouredly, and when he had shown them a few fancy strokes offered to back him at evens against Roberts.

With difficulty he escaped their insistence that they should dine together. They parted from him with the chaffing advice to "chuck the Press and come out as a professional cueist."

On his way through O'Connell Street he heard a boy crying the evening *Free Press*. He bought the paper but did not dare to look at it until he got home.

He was not sorry to find Grace out and to have the room to himself. He spread the paper flat on the table, and looked for the heading "Police Courts."

Then the blood rushed to his face and tingled to his finger-tips with sheer delight. There it was; his own case; written with his own hand. Never did genius contemplate its masterpiece with more rapture than the excited boy this bald, commonplace paragraph of his own devising.

In print! in print!—that was the charm of it; that was the magic of it. His own hastily-written words crystallized into type for every one to read. There is no stranger sensation than this of seeing one's self for the first time in print. The feeling wears off quickly, but the first thrill is something to remember.

As Gerald read down the report he could hardly believe it was his own—the transformation to clear,

cold type so startled him. Then came another feeling that intensified his delight; the sudden reaction from hopelessness. He had suffered badly for the last few months from the aching sense of incompetence. The feeling was hardest of all to bear when he got his chance as a reporter and—as he thought—failed. This little poor, bald police report was the first patch of blue in the dull grey sky of leaden despair that had closed round him so long.

The thing was possible for him, he felt at last. Here was the proof before him. He had got his foot on the ladder, and with a quick revulsion of hope he felt he could climb it to the top.

There came a light touch on his shoulder; looking up he met Grace's clear eyes shining back the joy of his own. With a vain effort to hide the pride of authorship he pointed to the paragraph.

"It is just splendid," she said softly, when she read it. "It is the very best thing in the whole paper. Will they pay you well for writing it?"

"Of course not," he answered almost petulantly, for the question brought him down out of the clouds, with a rough jar, on hard realities. "You don't understand, Grace. It is very kind of them to give me a chance gratis. The other fellows think nothing at all of what I find so hard and am so proud of."

He saw a shadow steal into her bright eyes, and his voice changed and softened. "But this means a lot to me all the same. It means that I can succeed, and I will. Oh, Grace, if you only knew how I

despaired, you would know what the change is! I am not the same man I was yesterday."

It was the first time in his life he called himself a man. He would not have ventured on it in the morning.

Then all at once joy made him clear-sighted; he fully realized for the first time how much he owed her; how patiently she had borne her share of the trouble; how often her cheery sympathy had saved him from despair. But she saw the dawning thought in his eyes and kissed him, protesting, "No, Gerald, no. It was all your own doing."

A happy evening after a long weary while of waiting had they together; their joy the brighter from the passing shadows of their fears. Their modest little plans for the future seemed to touch the limits of human felicity, and the quaint little room was a palace, for the two good fairies of life—Love and Hope—were there with them.

Grace slipped away early to her room, and Gerald finished *Treasure Island* with cosy contentment before he slept.

CHAPTER X

CLIMBING THE LADDER

"Patience and perseverance made a bishop of his reverence."
Old Irish saying.

GERALD'S troubles were not over. He found the chief in the morning by no means as impressed as he expected by the brilliancy of his police-court performance. He did not seem even aware of that magnificent exploit. But he gave him his work to do in a quiet matter-of-fact way more encouraging than praise.

The next day was Sunday, and Gerald took his note-book to church, choosing the quietest corner he could find. When the preacher got into the pulpit, he nervously stole out his book and pencil and began taking a surreptitious note, blushing furiously all the time. He had not written half-a-dozen words when he felt the jog of a sharp elbow in his ribs. There was an elderly lady glaring speechlessly at his profanity. He returned her gaze with such defiance as he could muster, a very poor show if the truth must be told, and resumed his work. Then she stretched

out a silk-mittened hand and quietly confiscated his note-book and pencil. It was his last attempt at shorthand reporting in church.

For the next fortnight Gerald worked on steadily, with alternate hot and cold fits of hope and despondency. But the hot fits grew longer and the cold fits shorter as the days went by. His shorthand improved with practice, and his clear free handwriting made his copy a prize for competition amongst the "comps." Every day the work got easier, and he had the pleasant feeling that he was of real use to the paper, though his name was not yet on the marking-book or the pay-sheet.

One Friday morning (if he lived a hundred years Gerald would never forget that morning) the chief called to him as the others left. "Wait a moment, Daly," he said abruptly, as if it were a matter of no consequence, "I have been talking to St. John about you. I told him your work is of money value to the paper and ought to be paid for. Your name goes down on the marking-book regularly from next week, and you can draw your first salary to-day. It is only a pound a week to begin with, but even that's better than a slap in the face."

Gerald was so stunned by the good news that he had not a word to answer. He had come to it at last. He was a wage-earner, a bread-winner, a man amongst men. What young fellow worth his salt has not thrilled with the same delight at this hall-mark of his manhood.

He managed to get out a few words of acknowledgment at last, stammering and blushing. The chief affected to be busy at his desk, but he watched him with kindly interest out of the corner of his eye, with a sudden recollection of his own feeling when the same pleasant announcement was first made to him.

Presently Gerald slipped out and got to the counter in front of the cashier's box, and took a little printed docket from a bundle that lay beside it as he had seen the other reporters do, with keenest envy. For this docket filled up for a pound he got back twenty shillings in silver, and pocketed the money as if he was quite used to that sort of thing.

But when he got out into O'Connell Street, he was tempted to dance down the broad pavement. Ever and again as he walked, his hand stole down into his pocket to finger, with more than a miser's rapture, the coins that jingled so musically.

Grace was hardly less excited and delighted than himself. They had a little feast that night to commemorate the great event. It was a very modest little feast, for their funds had run very low, and their entire fortune in the world was down to £38, with Gerald's earnings making £39.

But there was for them an inexhaustible El Dorado in the twenty pieces of silver spread out conspicuously on the table-cloth. If they had been gifted with Fortunatus' purse and Aladdin's lamp they could not have been more sublimely satisfied with their prospects.

It was plain sailing after this. Day by day the work grew easier to Gerald, till at last he began to wonder how he ever found it hard.

"I wish you could let me off that, chief," said Mr. Cooper one morning some months later, as he glanced over the marking-book. "I wanted this Saturday for myself. Besides, I know nothing about the thing and care less."

"But I have no one else," said the chief. Then with a sudden thought, "Do you know anything about cricket, Daly?"

"A little, sir."

"Then try what fist you can make of this," and he handed him two tickets for a cricket match in the College Park. "It's the last day of the match. Our boys are running the All England eleven very close, and it's on the cards they may win. The sporting man does the scores. A good three-quarter column of gush is all we want from you."

It was the first time he had been asked to do anything outside mere reporting, and he could not have got a pleasanter job. He had been longing for a look at the cricket match, when the College boys were gallantly holding their own against the All England, headed by the big black-bearded champion Grace.

He took Grace (his own Grace) with him for the day's outing. He was not there ten minutes when the excitement of the game captured him. He was a school-boy again. He cheered with the best of

them when young Weldon, whom once upon a time he had captained in the Clongowes eleven, lifted a ball to square leg, getting every ounce of strength in his body into the stroke, and sent it clean over the railings into Nassau Street. When finally Grace was caught out last man at "long on," with only two runs left to win or lose, the captain of the College team was not more enraptured than was Gerald at the Irish victory.

His excitement cooled down to a pleasant afterglow as he and Grace moved slowly round through the gay throng that buzzed with delight and triumph, while he feasted his eyes on lovely faces and she on lovely dresses, as boys and girls will after their kind, to the end of the chapter.

When he came to put his enthusiasm into writing his pen fairly flew away with him. By writing the first and last couple of pages large and the intermediate small, he managed to slip a column and a quarter, instead of three-quarters of a column, past the vigilant sub-editor. But where he expected blame, he got praise. The description caught on. There was quite a boom in the paper amongst cricket men. Even outsiders were attracted by the freshness and vigour of the style.

St. John Grayle was congratulated by an old cricketer at his club; he asked the chief who did the match, and he could hardly believe it was the "amateur" Daly whose existence he had forgotten. Forthwith he had Gerald up to his room, spoke of

the deep interest with which he watched his progress, congratulated him on his success, and sent him back to his work determined to do ten times better than before. St. John Grayle had the knack of getting the most and best work out of his men.

Nor was this all. When Gerald presented himself with his docket next Friday, the cashier tore up the docket and said, "There's some mistake here, Mr. Daly." Before Gerald could recover from his surprise, the cashier filled a second docket himself. "Sign that," he said, "and I'll give you three pounds for it. That's your weekly tot for the future."

CHAPTER XI

VIVA VOCE

"Resistless eloquence
Wielded at will that fierce democratie."
MILTON.

GERALD was getting on—yes, decidedly, he was getting on. He was no longer tortured by the fear of failure. He enjoyed his work, because he had mastered it. It was an active life and a pleasant one, full, it is true, of hard work, but full too of change and excitement. He could never tell for a day where he would be or what doing. He went everywhere and saw every one and everything. He lived in the centre of events and gathered up sensation and experience with both hands.

About this time the agrarian and national agitation in Ireland was at fever heat. Gerald was sent down to report many of the mass meetings at which the leaders spoke, and so caught the fever. The manifest sufferings of the people moved him quite as much as the eloquence of the orators, until his whole soul was in the movement. Then came an incident that was the turning point in his career.

There was a wild, out-of-the-way meeting announced in the West of Ireland, which "The Castle" was determined to suppress, and the Nationalist leaders equally determined to hold. The village where the meeting was to be held was twenty miles from the nearest railway station. Large bodies of police and soldiers were massed in the towns all round the place on Saturday, ready to be poured in on Sunday in good time for the batoning and bayoneting.

But Castle Government, as usual, proved no match for the quick-witted people. There was a sudden change of front, and the meeting was held on Saturday at midnight. One of the most eloquent and popular, as he was one of the most extreme, of the National leaders, slipped in the dark through the barricade, with Gerald on the car beside him to report the proceedings.

They were met a mile from the village by what seemed a roaring and flaming wall of fire, filling the still midnight air with light and tumult. The torch-bearers in the great crowd that welcomed them had soaked huge sods of dry peat in petroleum, and now held them aloft on the steel prongs of their hay-forks, flaring madly into the black sky. The noise of the cheering was like a hurricane. The few police of the village, who came out bewildered at the sudden tumult, were gently but firmly conducted back to their barracks, the parish priest courteously informing the sergeant that he would take the police arrangements into his own hands for the night.

The meeting, which was held in the market place of the little town, opened with the burning of the Government proclamation forbidding it, and the ashes, floating out over the crowd, were blown to dust by the breath of their vehement applause.

The leader's speech, delivered from the window of the chief house in the village, was full of that fierce eloquence that made hands clench and eyes blaze, and men spend their souls in cheering. Gerald, who had long ago caught the knack of writing and listening at the same time, felt his face flush and his heart throb with the thrilling power of the speech and scene. The red glare of the torches, the vast plain of white up-turned faces, and the glitter of myriad eyes that flashed fierce in the swaying lights, made the night electric with excitement.

A wild roar of applause, like the long shout of the wind in a storm, told that the speech had ended in a passionate appeal.

The parish priest spoke next, a pleasant-faced man with a mellow, good-humoured voice. He proposed a strongly-worded resolution, pledging the people to "organized resistance to unjust eviction." He proposed it in a few words with infectious good-humour. "Boys," he said, "I'm not going to give you a speech. ("Go on, father.") Ye hear enough from me on Sunday, and ye'll hear more from me with the blessing of God till ye learn to behave yourselves. But any one that breaks through this

resolution and rounds on his neighbours, the back of my hand to him from that day out."

"Who seconds the resolution?"

There was no one ready to second the resolution. The local leaders, fluent enough on ordinary occasions, hung back shyly. The people below were hungry and thirsty for more eloquence. There was a long pause.

"Go on, Daly," said the leader, pushing him towards the open window. "Give them a few words."

If he had time to think Gerald would have broken down. But he was speaking before he knew he was speaking. His thoughts found words without an effort. His fresh voice rang out clear and full to the very edge of the listening crowd. The passion that had been long glowing in his heart, flowed from him in hot words. In a moment he caught the crowd and held it. The excitement of the great assembly acted and reacted from speaker to listeners. All that vast crowd, whose eyes blazed and voices cheered as his words moved them, seemed part of his own being, so perfect was the unison between them. They filled and thrilled him with the inspiration of their concentrated passion.

He spoke for twenty-five minutes. It hardly seemed five to him or to them.

"Bravo," whispered the leader as he fell back from the fresh night air into the close room, "you

did first rate, first rate. We must get you into the House. It's the ante-room to the jail just now. But no one that thinks as you do and speaks as you can, has the right to stand outside. I'll say a word to Grayle and another to the great man himself. I think they'll manage it between them."

A few days later St. John sent for him. "They are thinking of running you for Parliament, Daly," he said; "I don't want to lose you on the *Free Press*, and I hope you don't want to part with us. You might do us a special Parliamentary sketch if you get in, and I would double your salary if that would suit. No thanks, my boy, you are worth every penny of it."

Next day he had a note from the chairman of the Party, with a curt and cold intimation that if he saw his way to enter Parliament as a member of the Irish Party, and accepting their pledge, he might rely on the Party's support for the first constituency available.

CHAPTER XII

THE START

"And now at our Irish elections
We vote as we like—every soul.
There's no use resisting shillalah,
For it's sure to come right at—the poll."

Old Irish Song.

A FEW months later the General Election, long expected, came at last and came suddenly. Gerald was sent down at a day's notice to fight an Ulster constituency. It was a touch and go seat. The Orange Party had won last time by two hundred and seventy-five votes. The successful candidate was standing again, and his party were putting forth their entire strength to return him. The forces were very evenly balanced. In the country the people are for the most part Nationalists; in the towns, of which there were about half-a-dozen small ones in the division, they were nearly all Orangemen.

The struggle promised and proved to be the fiercest and the closest of the General Election. It was, indeed, a campaign in miniature, with its

marches and counter-marches, its ambushes, its pitched battles, and its retreats.

Fiercer and fiercer waxed the fighting as the contest drew to a close. The rival forces engaged wherever and whenever the chance offered, with waving forests of shillalahs and pelting hail-storms of stones. Many a morning before starting from his hotel Gerald would tap his head lightly with the big knob of his blackthorn, and try to realize how it would feel if there was the whole strength of a strong man behind the blow. Yet when the row came he revelled in it without a thought of fear or danger. For at an election time in Ireland fun and fighting are words with the same meaning, and in fun or fighting Gerald was Irish to his finger tips.

He developed quite a genius for strategy in the conduct of the campaign. He carried his meetings about with him, "letting in the jungle" on the village as Mougli did in Kipling's inimitable tale. Now and again he massed his country contingents, marched in with them to a hostile town, and held a meeting in the market-place, completely cowing the townsfolk by their numbers and enthusiasm. The news of this exploit spreading abroad converted a score of doubtful votes to his side.

But he was not always fortunate. Returning one evening in a wagonette, with half-a-dozen staunch supporters, he came plump on a large meeting of

the enemy in the centre of a village through which the only road lay. They were not expected, and the crowd being just then intent on the Orange orator, they had almost got by unnoticed. But just at this moment a stentorian voice from the platform shouted, "We'll drive the rebelly Papishes into the Boyne." The challenge fetched Gerald's men at once, and they answered with a defiant yell, "Three cheers for Home Rule. Down, Orangemen, lie down."

In a moment the meeting was in confusion. The road had just been mended and ammunition was ready to the Orangemen's hands. The stones began to fly in long curves out of the heart of the crowd, and to rattle furiously round the wagonette. Hats were knocked off and heads broken, but the plucky Home Rulers still shouted defiantly, and waved the green flag with the harp without the crown in the face of the enemy. One stalwart young fellow, six feet two of muscular manhood, known to local fame as "the boy," picked up a huge stone that had fallen into the wagonette within one inch of his naked head, and sent it crashing through the top of the Orange big drum, silencing the music. Then, in the confusion, Gerald, plying the whip furiously, put the horses to a gallop and burst through the closing throng amid a parting deluge of stones.

He was out one morning on a canvassing expedition in the enemy's country, with a couple of partisans, whose arms were as strong as their political

opinions, and was surprised and set upon by a crowd of Orangemen. He and his friends had to beat a rapid retreat to the "blind" arch of a ruined bridge. There they sustained a stubborn siege for the whole length of the day, keeping their heads with their blackthorns against a host of assailants. When the dusk came, the besieged, by a sudden concerted rush, burst through the opposing lines and escaped to their own head-quarters, four miles across country "as the crow flies."

In Knockmachree, the chief town of the division, the Orange element strongly prevailed. On the other hand, Gerald's staunchest supporters were in the rural districts close round. The nomination day at Knockmachree was a trial of strength between the parties. By both sides flaming placards, green and yellow, were issued, inviting their friends "to assemble in their thousands." But the Orangemen managed to steal a march on their rivals. What country contingents they could collect stole in quietly at day-break, and, with the aid of the townsmen, captured the town. From the early morning they paraded the streets, inviting the Nationalists to come out and be beaten. About noon Gerald felt reluctantly compelled to accept the invitation, or forfeit the election. With half-a-dozen friends—the residue were away recruiting in the country—he fought his way through the crowd from the hotel to the court-house with the nomination paper. Some technical objections were made,

while the crowd howled outside, drowning the law argument with their clamour. But the law was clear, and the paper was accepted, and, making a sudden bolt for it, he got back without a scratch.

The day passed slowly and drearily for Gerald, cooped in his hotel, and he chafed and raged with the unreasoning passion of youth and warm blood when the Orangemen parading the town stopped to cheer and jeer under his window. It was even worse when the enemy drew away in a body to the broad sweep of rising ground at the head of the town to hold their meeting round the platform the Nationalists had erected, and left the street facing the hotel deserted and silent with the monotonous sunshine scorching the white ground.

Then all at once the oppressive silence was broken. The hot still air seemed to palpitate with low sound. Faint and far off the notes of a fife and drum band were heard. Gradually the sound grew in volume, mingling with the tramp of many feet. The deep boom of the drum was but slightly flavoured with the shrill shriek of the fife. But listening with all his ears, Gerald caught the tune at last.

They were playing "The Wearing of the Green."

In an instant his friends, who were sitting round in silence as gloomy as his own, leaped to their feet with a simultaneous shout, "The boys are coming."

"Now we'll see fun," said Tim Mulvany—a little, wiry, middle-aged man—with a pensive look at the

big blackthorn that had lain across his knee all the morning.

Tramp—tramp—tramp, the great body of men came marching along the hard road, while the hearts of the hearers kept time to the lilt of the music.

The head of the procession has reached the corner of the street. Now it comes sweeping in like a huge serpent, the hinder bulk still winding far out along the country road. Green banners float overhead. Every other man wears green leaves in his hat or a green scarf over his shoulders, and every man carries a blackthorn in his fist.

Right opposite the hotel there was a pause, and a cheer went up that seemed to fill the town with the volume of its sound. In the dead silence that followed the tones of another band were heard faint and far off. Again the sound swelled upon the listening ear, till "Garryowen to Glory" thrilled and throbbed in the still air with all the vigour the lungs of the fifers and the biceps of the drummers could impart. There poured in from the opposite direction a second Nationalist contingent, larger and more warlike than the first. As the two great crowds catch sight of each other, cheer after cheer roars out between them like thunder-claps from the clouds. Now they join forces and pack the wide space in front of the hotel window, stretching away on either side to the corners of the street.

"Show yourself, Mr. Daly, for the love of the Lord,

show yourself, sir," cried Tim Mulvany, and he threw up the window as he spoke. When Gerald appeared the storm of voices burst forth again, wilder than before. There was not a man in the vast crowd but knew him. Again and again his name was shouted in a deafening roar as if the heaven's thunder had grown articulate.

"It's waiting for you they are, Mr. Daly," said Father Pat McGrath, "they're wanting you at their head. It's I that would like to take part in the sport myself, but maybe it's better not."

Gerald caught up his hat and stick and went down the stairs four at a time.

"Way for Mr. Daly, way for him," was shouted as he came, and he was almost carried to the front of the procession. Then both bands struck up "O'Donnell Aboo" together with deafening vigour, and the huge crowds surged slowly up the streets towards the broad slope of the market-place in whose centre the platform for the Nationalist meeting was erected.

This platform had been captured by the Orangemen early in the day. They were now protected by the police in possession of their prize. The magistrate ranged his men two deep, with fixed bayonets, half-way up the broad slope. As the Nationalist crowd converged at the foot, he began to read the Riot Act from behind the double row of armed men. He was quite pale from excitement, and his voice was no more than a hoarse whisper, unheard amid the

din of cheer and counter cheer that shook the summer air so savagely.

In another moment Gerald found himself at the head of a headlong charge right up the slope upon the double row of shining bayonets and the stalwart figures in dark green uniform that barred the way. A shower of stones came pouring over the heads of the police from the Orangemen behind. But there was no pause in that fierce charge till it burst on the armed line. The police were but half in earnest. Their weapons were too deadly for active use. Their strength was their weakness. Most of them threw up the keen points and pushed and smote with the butt end of their guns at the on-rushing crowd. But the blackthorns waved freely and fell fast, and at each stroke a man went down. Close at Gerald's side was "the boy," lean and lithe and strong as a young panther. His shillalah flew like a flail, and in the winking of an eye he had three policemen tumbled and a clear gap broken through the line. The next moment he was stabbed with a bayonet in the thigh and slashed over the bare head with the district inspector's sabre, and went down in the rush without a groan.

The charge was hardly checked for a moment by the resistance. The weight and impetus of the big crowd burst through as a big ship's prow bursts through the opposing water and tosses it to either side. As they swept triumphantly on, the Orangemen broke and fled pell mell down the slope on the other side.

When Gerald came to himself he was standing on the platform with the great crowd stretched out below. He was not conscious of having taken any part in the brief fight. But he still drew his breath hard and still clutched at his blackthorn so tightly that the knobs hurt his right hand.

"Begor, you're mighty handy with the stick entirely, Mr. Daly, God bless you," said Tim Mulvany approvingly. It was the only hint Gerald got that he had used it.

A great meeting followed. Fiery speeches rang out from the recaptured platform. The Orangemen, mewed up in a far corner of the town with a double row of police round them, could hear the storm of defiant cheers, again and again renewed.

The meeting closed in triumph, and Gerald was stepping down the ladder from the platform, when a ragged small boy pulled him by the coat.

"Well, my lad," he said. "What is it?"

"Mick Larkin—'the boy' they does be callin' him—is wishful of one word with yer honour."

Gerald had a quick feeling which he did not know was remembrance, that something had happened to "the boy."

"Where is he?"

"Beyant in Phil O'Neill's, yer honour."

Phil O'Neill was the Nationalist butcher and a man of note in the town. Gerald knew his house well. He flung a shilling to the messenger, and slipping through the crowd that made way for him with much

touching of hats and "God save yer honour," he was off as fast as he could walk to Phil O'Neill's.

"The boy" was stretched on a sofa in Phil's best parlour, his long legs protruding over a chair at the foot. His head was swathed in linen bandages, through which showed spots of rusty brown. His face was white as the linen cloth, and his big blue-black eyes, bigger and blacker from the pallor of his face, blazed startlingly.

The blinds were down and a lamp burned in the room.

"The boy" raised himself on his elbow as Gerald entered. "All went well, Mr. Daly," he said in a voice in which there was no sign of weakness. "Glory be to God but we swept them fine, police and all."

Gerald had noted the young fellow overflowing with life at a score of meetings. He had seen him leap three feet into the air, twirling his huge black-thorn in a fervour of patriotism at the name of the old land. It shocked him to see this young giant, now, wounded and prostrate.

"My poor fellow," he said softly, "you are badly hurt, I'm afraid."

"There's no call to pity me, sir," broke in the other quickly, the blue eyes flashing and the pale lips smiling. "I was hurted in the good cause. Sure if I was killed itself in the good cause it would be a thing to be proud of. I was only wanting to shake your hand, sir, and wish you good luck and God speed

to the end. I'm afeared there's small chance of my being out again till the battle is won, with the blessing of God. But there's no use grumblin', sure I got my share of the fun anyhow while I was in it."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FINISH

"Aye so ends the tussle,
I knew the tan muzzle
Was first—though the ring men were yelling dead heat.
A nose I could swear by,
But Clarke said the mare by
A short head—and that's how the favourite was beat."

GORDON.

THE polling day came at last to close the fierce struggle. There were a dozen polling booths scattered up and down through the division. Contrary to the advice of the more prudent of his friends, Gerald determined to make a final round of the constituency, and chartered a fast horse and a plucky driver for his perilous tour.

He had some startling experiences before it was over. Political opinion was curiously and sharply isolated in the division. Here the people were nearly all Nationalists. Next door—as it were—they were nearly all Orangemen. But there was always just the insignificant minority that sufficed to keep the majority's enthusiasm at boiling point. At one

village Gerald was received with a whirlwind of welcome and found his opponents penned away in a corner, like a small lot of sheep in a fair, shepherded by the police.

From the next village, not half-a-dozen miles distant, he was driven out under a hail shower of stones and a storm of "boos."

Ballywrack was the last place on his round. It was in the very heart of the enemy's country; the strongest of the Orange strongholds. Gerald found it in possession of the enemy when he entered. Luckily, however, there was a fair-minded magistrate and a strong force of police, or he could not have entered at all.

Still in spite of both, the Nationalist voters had a hard time of it. The police had quite enough to do to keep order in the streets. In the five polling booths the Orangemen had it all their own way. Every official in the booths, to a man, was of the Orange persuasion. Personation was there carried to a fine art. The common-place personator is content to take from the list the name of a friendly voter who is absent or dead. But here the bolder artist took on him for the nonce the identity of a Nationalist voter who was himself present to record his vote. This was a double-barrelled shot. A vote was at the same time gained for the Orange candidate and lost to the Nationalist.

The personator took care to vote early, and when the real "Simon Pure" presented himself he

was promptly bustled out of the booth as an impostor.

Gerald encountered many disconsolate supporters in the street complaining bitterly that "their names had been trespassed on."

Thus for some hours he went about busily from booth to booth, trying to secure some semblance of fair play for his supporters.

It was a service of small gain and much peril. Now and again a stone would fly out of the crowd, so close that he felt the wind of it on his cheek.

At five o'clock a clean sweep had been made of the register. Every name on it was polled out, though a full fourth of the rightful owners of the names were in England, America, or in their graves. The personators did their work cleanly in Ballywrack.

All day the excitement had been simmering hotter and hotter. By this time it was at boiling point. At the closing of the booths the pent-up energy of the Orangemen was turned loose into the street. Gerald as the only Nationalist left was naturally the object of their attentions. As he walked up the town from the court-house a stone knocked his hat off; a second just grazed his ear—the first scratch he had got in the election.

His hat fell at the feet of the magistrate, who took it up and handed it to him politely.

"Bad work," he said; "Mr. Daly, you are too venturesome, you really are. I'll order a baton charge of police and clear those blackguards off the streets."

But Gerald begged him to do nothing of the kind. He had rather a kindly feeling towards the Orangemen who could work themselves up to such a pitch of enthusiasm. He liked zeal in a bad cause much better than apathy in a good one.

"Please don't, Mr. Purcell," he said earnestly. "We have pulled through without it so far, let us pull through to the end. I'm the only stumbling-block to the peace, and I'm just off. When I'm gone they will have no one to fight with and nothing to fight about, unless they kick up a row in the pure exuberance of their unanimity."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Daly, I was anxious that you should get shut of the town before dusk. I'll have your car and driver brought to you. Our men have been looking after both."

In a moment later the car was seen coming up the broad, steep street that was the thoroughfare of Ballywrack, followed by a dense crowd. The driver had put green rosettes in his horse's ears and tied a bow of green ribbon on his whip, which he cracked defiantly.

Within twenty yards of the top, the police formed across the street and held back the crowd.

Gerald jumped up on the car without stopping it.

"Good-bye, Mr. Purcell, and thanks," he shouted.

"Good-night. Take care of yourself," said the magistrate.

At the head of the street there was a sharp turn to the right. One stone—a long shy—rattled on the

panel of the car as they went round the corner. It was their parting salute from Ballywrack. A demesne ran right up to the town. Upon the high deer-park wall that stretched along the road side, the magistrate had prudently posted policemen to prevent stone throwing by ambushed Orangemen.

When they got to the open country the driver laid the whip sharply across his horse's flanks, and the spirited animal broke into a twelve-mile-an-hour trot. They bowled along the smooth road at a gallant rate, all danger, as it seemed, at an end. But on turning a sharp corner about two miles from Ballywrack, the horse was jerked up so suddenly that he came back on his haunches, and Gerald, who was in a brown study, nearly went out over the front of the car.

At one glance he recognized the peril of his position. Right in front, scarcely two hundred yards away, the road was black with a great crowd of men. His eye bulked them at three hundred at least, with about a score of horsemen in front. They were marching at a quick pace, but even as he looked they halted, blocking the road.

"Well, sir," said the driver stolidly, "what's best to be done? There are a good few of them in it."

Gerald noticed that already his man had quietly shifted his whip in his hand, the thong was now coiled round his wrist, and the loaded butt end swung free.

"Back or forwards, yer honour? Give the word."

In a moment Gerald decided. "They have caught us in a trap, Darby, with Ballywrack behind us. We must break through if we can. Drive slowly till we come within forty yards, then lay in the whip and go a burster right through them. Get the rug round your head to keep off the stones, but leave your eyes and arms free. I'll do the same. If they try to catch the horse we must be ready for them."

They moved on cautiously, while the crowd stood stock still. Amid the dead silence of expectancy, the cawing of a straggling train of rooks, that came streaming home through the fading roselight of the evening, was the only sound heard. It was too dusk to distinguish faces, even when they drove closer. But something in the stand of the men told of angry determination.

Nearer and nearer they crept. Darby gets ready to dash. The first stone thrown will send him straight into the heart of the throng. There is a stir in the front row now, and a whisper runs through them. Then suddenly like a thunder-clap a cheer breaks out, and the whole crowd is in motion in a moment.

The tightly-reined horse shied half across the road at the sudden sound. But Darby's strong wrists steadied him. Again the cheer breaks out from the moving mass of men, and a grove of blackthorns is suddenly waved over their heads. Darby loosens his left hand on the reins and tightens his right on the whip.

But Gerald stretched across and snatched both from his grasp.

"Listen," he said.

The cheer broke out from the crowd louder than ever.

"Hi for Daly!" they shouted. "Daly for ever!"

They were his own friends. Like a mountain stream they flowed round the car. A dozen strong hands were stretched to Gerald. His fingers were jammed together, and his arms almost wrenched from their sockets by the rough vigour of their grasp.

"We heerd tell your honour was hurted within in Ballywrack," said the leader—a champion faction fighter in the old days—"and we were going in to see about it."

He was an elderly man with a grey head and a very slow voice, but there was not a man in the county—so fame averred—"could save his skull from Mike Rafferty's kippeen."

"Faith, your honour is a fine supple traveller to bring your life safe out of it, and you all alone. But we had best be moving again, boys, or the night will be on to us before we're there. Steady, there, steady, and form up behind the car."

Rafferty himself went to the horse's head and faced him back to Ballywrack.

"What are you doing—where are you going?" cried Gerald.

"To Ballywrack, sure enough, your honour," said Rafferty's slow voice. "With the blessing of God

we'll show you a small taste of divarshin before the night is out, to make up for the tadious day you put up in the Orange hole. Move on, boys."

"Stop," shouted Gerald, and they halted; but every foot was planted, every eye was turned in the direction of Ballywrack.

It seemed as easy to dam a stream down a hillside as to hold them back from the fight. There was but one power to turn them, the hope of a better fight somewhere else.

"Boys," shouted Gerald, "the ballot boxes are coming into Knockmachree to-night. If the Orangemen get hold of them we are done for. It'll take us our best speed to get there before them. There's time enough for Ballywrack."

The crowd came round like a horse to the rein.

"Be said be Mr. Daly, our member that's to be," shouted Rafferty. "Who knows what ructions may be ruz in Knockmachree, and we out of it! Back's the word."

Again the car was forced through to the other side of the crowd, the mounted men drew up close round it, and the whip was laid smartly across the back of the horse, which broke into a gallop, whirling the car along recklessly with leaps and bumps over the rough road through the fast falling night. So amid the wild music of galloping horses and shouting voices Gerald rattled back safe to Knockmachree.

There were no "ructions" that night, much to the disappointment of the partisans of both sides, who,

like Carleton's little tailor, were "blue-mouldy for the want of a beating."

At ten in the morning began the counting of the votes, behind locked doors in a great room in the court-house. It was the last lap in the race—the last battle in the hard-fought campaign. Excitement was intensified to pain. Gerald had entered on the election with little hope and less anxiety. But the spirit of battle had got into his blood, till he had come to regard success as the crowning triumph of his life, and defeat as disgrace. Colonel Kirkwood, his Orange opponent, was even more excited. This veteran, who had served gallantly in half-a-dozen campaigns, was now as white as the ballot papers.

The plan of counting was simple enough. First all the papers were emptied out in one huge pile from the ballot boxes on to the table, and the total rapidly reckoned without regard to which side the votes were cast. There were nominally thirteen thousand seven hundred and sixteen electors in the division. There were eleven thousand nine hundred and eighty-six ballot papers counted.

Then the twenty counters, officially appointed by the sheriff, set to work at the huge pile, dividing the votes, and ranging them in little heaps of a hundred each—the "Dalys" on one side, and the "Kirkwoods" on the other. The friends of the candidates, admitted to the room on oath of secrecy, watched the operation as a cat watches a mouse. The counters counted only when the X was set plainly, as the law

prescribes, before the name of either candidate. All doubtful papers were put away in a heap by themselves for the decision of the sheriff and his assessor, who passed judgment without appeal, rejecting or receiving them.

The most elaborate and repeated instructions had been given to the voters by both sides during the contest in the simple process of marking the papers. Yet it was amazing what an ingenuity of blunder was displayed. Gerald suffered most. His name coming first on the list, many of his supporters insisted on putting the X over it, instead of opposite it; and all the papers so marked were ruled out.

One elector, however, though his vote was lost, managed to convey his views with unmistakable clearness. Opposite Gerald's name he wrote the words, "To h— with the Pope;" and opposite Kirkwood's, "To h— with the landlords." In those few words there was a summary of his religious and political creed so nicely balanced as to produce this political dead-lock.

Slowly the hot day wore itself away. Gerald paced the stuffy room incessantly, with eyes restlessly roving over the growing heaps of ballot papers. The long wait sickened him. After the month of excitement, it was horribly slow and hard to bear.

By slow degrees the big heap of ballot papers grew smaller and smaller, and the little heaps round it grew larger and larger as the day wore on. At first Gerald seemed to have it all his own way. The

ballot boxes from the districts where he was strongest had been emptied on top of the pile. Five out of every six papers that came out had the cross before his name. Then Colonel Kirkwood had his innings. Gradually his score drew level with his opponent's, and they ran neck and neck to the close.

The great heap dwindled down to a few scattered papers and disappeared, entirely absorbed. The little heaps of one hundred each were arranged symmetrically in columns like a great sum of simple addition—Daly on one side, Kirkwood on the other. Only the odd votes admitted on appeal remained, fifty-five for Kirkwood, thirty-one for Daly, and the count was over.

The sub-sheriff ran his keen glance along the marshalled regiment of ballot papers, totting the columns. Gerald's glance followed his. Up and down the lines their eyes went. Sixty completed piles they counted on one side, and again, sixty piles on the other. Six thousand a side. Kirkwood had won by the odd votes—six thousand and fifty-five to six thousand thirty-one. The sheriff's eye brightened as he closed his calculation. His man was in.

"Colonel Kirkwood," he said very suavely, "you have won by a majority of twenty-four. It only remains for me to announce the numbers, and declare you the member for the division."

Gerald's heart sank until it almost seemed to leave a void in his breast. One glance round showed blank dismay on the faces of the friends who had fought so

well in this forlorn fight. Beaten! beaten! beaten! The word seemed to sound in the pulses of his heart, and the throbbing of his temples. He was sick with disappointment, and leaned against the table striving vainly to steady his nerves.

Colonel Kirkwood straightened and stiffened by the sheriff's words, as though he had been presented with the Victoria Cross in front of his regiment. Something of the old ascendency spirit came upon him in the moment of triumph, conquering the innate courtesy of the man.

"Mr. Daly," he said, turning a little contemptuously to Gerald, as he followed the sheriff towards the door, "I congratulate you on your—defeat."

The sting of his words roused Gerald in a moment from his stupor; the old dogged resolve to fight the fight out to the last came back to him. His thoughts were quickened, and with the quickening came a gleam of hope. The sub-sheriff's hand was on the door-key when he shouted, "Stop!" With his hand still on the key the sub-sheriff turned to him. There was a smile on his face; he could make allowances.

Every eye in the room was fixed on Gerald.

"Mr. Sheriff," he went on steadily, "what is the total vote?"

"The totals," replied the sheriff blandly, with the smile still on his face, "are Kirkwood 6055, Daly 6031."

"I don't mean that," Gerald retorted impatiently. "What is the gross total of votes cast in the division?"

"Eleven thousand nine eighty-six," read the sheriff from a scrap of paper in his hand. Even while he read the smile died out of his face, and a puzzled dismay crept into it.

"I see your drift, Mr. Daly," he said, a little vaguely; "the figures don't tally. I suppose we must have overcounted the gross total by a hundred. Still I think——"

While he rambled on, Gerald's quick eye was again on the regiment of ballot papers. It caught the error this time. One of Colonel Kirkwood's piles was a little out of line, and so contrived to get counted in two columns.

Gerald pointed to the offending pile: "I think you counted this twice, Mr. Sheriff," he said very quietly, though his heart was beating like a sledge-hammer. "I made the same mistake myself, at first."

The blot was hit. But the sheriff counted again twice over before he would give in; Gerald was blazing with impatience.

"You are quite right, Mr. Daly," he said at last; "I apologize for my mistake. The correct figures are, Daly six thousand and thirty-one; Kirkwood, five thousand nine fifty-five."

The incident had passed so quickly, that the sound of Colonel Kirkwood's taunt was still in Gerald's ears. The temptation to retort was too strong for him.

"Colonel Kirkwood," he said, "I beg to reciprocate your congratulations in the spirit in which they were offered."

It was a piece of boyish bravado. He was sorry for his words the moment they were spoken, for the Colonel was hit hard. The ambition of his life was lost at the moment when he thought it was won. His face was ashen grey, and his breath came quick and short, while his eyes wandered from the piles of papers to the sheriff's face and back again, with a kind of mute entreaty, as though even yet the result might be changed.

Like a man stunned by a heavy blow, and only half conscious, he followed the sheriff and the successful candidate out to the door of the court-house, whose tall stone steps gave on the open space already described.

Dead silent was the expectant crowd till the sheriff read the figures and declared the result. Then a wild storm of cheering, passionate and prolonged, proclaimed that another Orange stronghold had fallen to the National forces in Ireland. His friends would have caught Gerald and chaired him through the town; but he slipped out through a side door, and so escaped to the post-office. The telegram he sent to Grace consisted of a signature only—"Gerald, M.P."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. GRANDISON

"Then dressed by thee more amiably fair,
Truth the soft robe of mild persuasion wears.
Thou to assenting reason giv'st again
Her own enlightened thoughts. Called from the heart
The obedient passions on thy voice attend,
And e'en reluctant party feels awhile
Thy gracious power, as through the varied maze
Of eloquence, now smooth, now quick, now strong,
Profound and clear you roll the copious flood."

THOMSON.

THROUGH a very whirlwind of excitement, bands by day and torches at night, and speech-making day and night, Gerald at last got clear of the town and away to Dublin. Grace's welcoming smile and kiss were the very crown of his triumph.

"I knew you would win," she said, in her own soft, low-toned voice that trembled with pride in him and joy for him, "and so I have got all ready for your trip to London."

"It is only for a week, you know, Grace," said the newly-fledged legislator; "it will take us no more than that to put our enemies out and our friends in."

London was a bewilderment and a delight to Gerald. The hugeness of the place and the concentration of human life in it almost frightened him, and Westminster was the very centre and focus of his fascination. He had not thought very much of the position which he had won except as it gave him a chance to work more effectively for Ireland. He was amazed to find how much the outer world thought of it. He had no sooner got the two magic letters "M.P." to his name than the post poured in on him a perfect deluge of offers and applications. The illustrated papers wanted his photograph. Debrett wanted an abstract of his biography. There were innumerable demands for his approval or purchase. Quite a number of people were solicitous about his residence. He was offered by one house-agent a five years' term of a palatial mansion in the West End, with all the appliances of modern luxury and stabling for fourteen horses, for the mere trifle of £1200 a year and £4000 fine. He did not, however, avail himself of this liberal offer, but put up at a little private hotel in Craven Street, where he had his bed and breakfast for a more moderate stipend.

On the opening day Gerald was amongst the first down to the House. After a brief parley with a policeman he got safe through the members' entrance, and found himself in the circular inner lobby facing the entrance to the Legislative Chamber. Here, where the faithful Commons most do congregate, the liveli-

ness and excitement took his breath away. On all sides the legislators were wringing each other by the hands in the fervour of mutual congratulations. Some were exulting in the closeness of the victory; others in the bigness of the majority. It was the triumph of the survivors after a battle where many had fallen.

Gerald felt quite lonely in the midst of the excited throng where everybody seemed to know everybody else, and drifted away hopelessly bewildered in the labyrinth of the passages and corridors.

Suddenly he felt a friendly hand on his shoulder, and a friendly voice with a pleasant flavour of the "brogue" in it called him by his name.

"Welcome," it said, "to the enemy's country," and Gerald turning round found his hand clasped by the Irish leader who first introduced him to a platform at the midnight meeting, and whom he thought at that moment was lodged securely in one of her Majesty's jails.

"I have come straight from the prison to Parliament," replied the other, answering his look of surprise; "my last six months was up yesterday. But you are a new-comer, and I know the ways of the place, worse luck. You owe me a grudge for bringing you here, and I'm bound to do what I can to mitigate the misfortune. Have you taken a place yet? Come along."

They passed into the "House" to secure their seats and out again into the lobby bare-headed, amongst the bare-headed legislators. Then Gerald

was taken to the Sergeant-at-Arms' office and secured a key for one of the coveted little lockers whose carved doors wainscotted the long passages running from the chamber to the library and from the library to the dining-room.

Presently they came upon an old cloister with Gothic groins and arches now degraded to a cloak-room, and where Gerald was surprised to find his own name, Daly, neatly printed amongst the D's, over a peg near the door. There was no hat-stand. The hat was, as he afterwards discovered, a very essential part of the legislator's equipment in the legislative chamber.

He had barely adjusted the little dangling halter of red tape to the neck of his umbrella, when he felt —rather than heard—a low booming sound like far distant thunder.

"He's coming," shouted some one, and thereupon a score of men ran bare-headed towards the entrance to Palace Yard, close at hand. Instinctively he ran with them. The place was deserted, steeped in placid sunshine, with a swarm of pretty pigeons pecking in the gravel or soaring high up against the great tower.

All at once Big Ben boomed out, scattering the birds wide into the blue air. Like the deep vibration of the last stroke, the distant roar was heard again, growing momentarily louder until it swelled into a deafening tumult.

A vast crowd came swarming down Whitehall into Westminster. They stormed and eddied round an open carriage, with waving arms and hats and

kerchiefs, and a great cheering in which there was no pause.

Through the thick of the crowd which opened to let it pass, the carriage came slowly into Palace Yard. But when the police closed in behind to bar the passage, they were swept away by the sheer impetus of that great moving mass of humanity. In an instant the yard was full of triumphant tumult. Slowly the carriage crept through the excited crowd that pressed closer and closer round it, while the deafening clamour of applause filled the wide air and sent the pigeons whirling away skywards like dead leaves in a storm.

As the carriage drew closer, Gerald saw in it a little girl of two or three years, flushed and open-eyed, half frightened, half delighted with the tumult; an old lady wholly pleased and proud, whose loving eyes never turned for a moment from the stately white-haired man at her side that bowed so graciously to the worshipping people.

The wonderful face of the man captured Gerald's eyes and held them by its power and dignity. The features seemed to be carved in ivory, so pure the colour, so clear the outline. The eyes were full of fire! the whole face wreathed in smiles as the sea wrinkles and beams in the breeze and sunshine.

Slowly the carriage passed on and disappeared at another entrance to the building. And at once the crowd melted away out of the Palace Yard almost as quickly as it entered and much more quietly.

"Who was it?" said Gerald to an English Liberal member at his side who had cheered with the rest.

The man looked at him for a moment as if in doubt, but the "brogue" and smile convinced him.

"That?" said he at last—"why that's Mr. Grandison, who is to be Prime Minister for the fourth time next week. The man," he added after a pause, "who is going to make your country and my country friends, the biggest job and the best that even he has ever put his hand to."

The next few days were a whirl of restless excitement for Gerald. The attack on the Government was resolute, the defence desperate. The greatness of the issue and the greatness of the actors enthralled him.

But the stately drama almost culminated in a farce. When at last two hours before midnight Mr. Turvey, a pompous member of the Government, superbly swelling like a turkey-cock, rose to close the debate, the spirit of mischievous school-boys came suddenly on the legislative assembly. Mr. Turvey was a big man with big gestures and a small voice. He had all the attributes of a great orator, except the eloquence. The rumour ran round that two of the Tories had missed their trains, and that he was put up to speak against time. Instantly the place was filled with tumult. The voices of quick-witted tormentors played round the ponderous orator as swallows round a crow. Every sentence of his was twisted from its meaning by some comical interrup-

tion. The chorus of laughter and applause never slackened for a moment. In vain the unhappy Mr. Turvey, tied as it were to the oratorical stake, rebuked and appealed. His gestures were as ample as ever, but his voice had died away to a mere husky whisper before the ordeal was over. The climax came when the most audacious member of the Irish party was seen pushing his way through the crowd at the bar of the House. With a profound obeisance to the Speaker he marched solemnly up the floor between the densely-thronged benches, with a large tumblerful of water, and while the unconscious orator was pounding away with inaudible vigour, he planted the refreshment at his elbow.

The shriek of laughter made Mr. Turvey turn. When he met the bland smile of the mocking Ganymede, he almost collapsed. One imploring glance for release he cast upon his leader, who was curled up on the bench beside him. But with a quick imperative gesture, the leader told him the time was not yet come, so he staggered on again helpless, hopeless through the ever-growing tumult. Slowly the hands of the clock began to join one another at midnight. Then a hundred impatient voices shouted "time, time!" and the impotent orator collapsed at last.

As he fell the Speaker rose, stately and impassive. The question was put on which hung the fate of the Government, followed by thunderous roars of "aye" and "no."

In the confusion of his first division, Gerald was almost through the door into the wrong lobby, when he was captured by the Irish Whip and put right. The crowds edged and wedged themselves an inch at a time through the long passages. Gerald found himself duly ticked off by the clerks at the turn-stile and duly counted by the Whips, and back in the chamber itself waiting for the verdict.

It seemed a long wait though no more than a minute, so great was the impatient tension of suspense. At last the Whips marched, two and two, up the floor with the tally papers in their hands. In a hush like death the figures were read—three hundred and fifty to three hundred and ten. The old Government was out and the new Government was in by a majority of forty. Home Rule had conquered Coercion. In the loud, long roar of applause that hailed the victory, the fiercely exultant cheer of the Irish brigade was the dominant note.

With an exhilarating sense of power and triumph in his blood Gerald walked home in the grey dawn to his attic in Craven Street. For he—even he—was counted as one in the majority which had changed the rulers of the British Empire and gave his own land the best hope she ever yet had of liberty.

A six months' interlude in Dublin went rapidly by, and the following February found Gerald and Grace settled down at a private hotel within easy distance of the House of Commons. Gradually the interest of the place, which grips all who enter it and holds them

to the end, protest or struggle as they may, laid firm hold on Gerald, and grew to be part of his life.

The day was fixed at last for the first reading in the House of Commons of Mr. Grandison's long-expected measure of Home Rule for Ireland. Curiosity and excitement passed all bounds. To avoid the invasion of Westminster by eager legislators in the small hours of the morning, the Speaker ordained that the doors of the Chamber should not be opened before twelve. The only result was to have the crowd outside. From early dawn the lobby was thronged. At first there was a pretence of patience. Two long rows of chairs stretched from the doors right across the lobby with a decorous legislator in each. But long before the time fixed for the opening, frank irrepressible excitement got the better of them all. The seats were abandoned and the dense mob of members pressed and surged against the double row of constables that formed a good-humoured but impregnable barrier before the carved door of the sacred chamber itself. For two long hours they stood, squeezed tight as herrings in a barrel, with faces set immovably towards the door. The time was beguiled with good-humoured badinage. "Sabre cuts of Saxon speech" were freely interchanged. The teetotal members were especially beset with entreaties "to pass along the flask and not be selfish." At eleven a man came with a ladder to set and wind the clock over the door, and was overwhelmed with

piteous appeals to give the hands "just one turn more."

As "Big Ben" boomed out twelve, making the air vibrate with the deep sound, the policemen melted away on either side. The doors opened, and the tumultuous crowd went through into the solemn Chamber like a torrent when the dam goes down.

Gerald had been in many a rough-and-tumble football scrimmage in his time, but never in anything so rough and fierce as this wild stampede that went tearing along the floor of the "most august Assembly in the world." The members burst like bulls along the passages, they scattered like monkeys over the benches, and in the twinkling of an eye there was a hat on every seat. Young, strong, and active, Gerald was in the first flight, and secured the corner seat he coveted, almost facing Mr. Grandison's place on the Treasury Bench.

By prayer time, every lane and alley of the Chamber was crammed as tight as they could hold with imported chairs, every stair of the gangway was claimed with a hat.

The final "amen" was hardly pronounced by the chaplain of the House when the sound of a second excited scramble broke out. Glancing up at the Peers' gallery, Gerald was just in time to see the ancient nobility of England tumble like a waterfall through the open door—one mass of lordly legs and arms and heads and bodies, struggling together in inexplicable confusion.

The House settled down for a while to the outward calm and silence of eager anticipation. But when the Old Man appeared at last, beaming and débonnaire as a bridegroom, with a fresh red rose-bud in his button-hole, the whole place went mad once more with unrestrained excitement. The Irish Nationalists and the English Liberals leaped to their feet, waving their hats, and there went up a wild roar of applause, a vast volume of sound that seemed to shake the carved roof of the historic chamber, which in all its varied history had never witnessed a more exciting scene.

Suddenly the sound died out to stillest silence, for the speech, so long and so eagerly looked for, had begun. The greatest statesman and orator of the century was unfolding the treaty of peace between two nations whose bitter feud had lasted through seven centuries.

His voice was low at first, but gathered power at every word till it filled the building—strong and pure like the master tones of an organ. No attribute of the orator was lacking in that marvellous speech; lucid exposition, clear reasoning, passionate appeal captured alike the mind and heart of his hearers. Graceful, erect, alert, with word and face and gesture fitted to the thought, in this miraculous man the vigour of youth and the dignity of age were marvellously combined.

With Gerald the strain of enthusiasm became almost unbearable, as he heard the cause he loved

championed with such matchless power. He listened in a kind of ecstasy, hands and teeth clenched tight, face pale with the intensity of his excitement. The great speech drew to a close in solemn, majestic rhythm, sublime as the utterance of an inspired prophet whom God had commissioned to deliver this message of justice and peace to men.

His last word fell softly on the profound silence, and then once again the pent-up fervour he awakened found vent in a very hurricane of applause.

In that hour, whether in fear or hope, no man there doubted the spoken word would be accomplished.

During the months of tedious, long, protracted struggle that ensued, Gerald by very slow degrees settled down to the routine of his parliamentary life and duties. He began with questions. When he had learned to hear his own voice in the House without a heart-beat, he prepared his maiden speech with much care. Half-a-dozen times that evening he popped up to speak and, so to speak, "muffed" the Speaker's eye. He was troubled with a keen sense of the comicality of this performance, and had just determined to give up, when at half-past seven he got his chance at last.

"Mr. Daly," the Speaker sang out in resonant tones.

His heart gave one great throb; then seemed to stop beating as he rose.

"Mr. Speaker," he began——

"Order, order," said Mr. Speaker, and skipping out of his chair departed for his tea.

The House emptied, and Gerald was left sitting alone, waiting in a very fever of nervousness. The clock itself seemed to have an interval for refreshments, the next twenty-five minutes stretched itself out to two hours. At last the Speaker returned, but only the Speaker. Gerald's maiden oration was delivered to the Chair, the Sergeant-at-Arms, and a wilderness of empty green benches. His jokes fell flat on irresponsive vacancy and his peroration seemed pure burlesque. He was horribly ashamed and disappointed when he got the thing over. He had forgotten the reporters, who had treated him well as one of the fraternity, so that Grace reading the speech the next day thought it the best (except Mr. Grandison's, perhaps) that had been delivered in the debate.

Others must have thought well of it, too, for he had an audience when he next spoke a month later. The saving gift of humour commended him to an assembly which loves above all things to be amused. After a while, it came to pass the members began to crowd in instead of crowding out, when he was on his legs.

He had got the ear of the House.

CHAPTER XV

'LIGHTLY TURNS TO THOUGHTS OF LOVE'

"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight."—MARLOW.

TWO months later found Gerald and Grace still settled down in Craven Street. It was a pleasant life, growing daily pleasanter for Gerald as practice eased the strain of his double duties. In the House of Commons, to his surprise, he found the theory that all members are equal was more than a theory. Perhaps in no place in the world does rank or wealth count less or brains more. The man is judged there by what he is—not by what he has, or is called. The strong thinking, strong spoken, rough labour member, clad in coarse serge and pot hat, his hands hard from their grip on the hammer, is more regarded in the House and in the smoking-room than the duke's eldest son, dainty as a Dresden china figure and with head as empty.

In the intervals of press work, Gerald managed a short story or two for the magazines. Practice had limbered his style. The magic letters "M.P." got his stories read, their merits got them published. His

name began to be whispered as a young author who did good work and might go far. But as the Home Rule debate grew to a close, the House of Commons absorbed his whole waking life, and Grace shared his eagerness to the uttermost.

She was often with him on the terrace, or oftener still in the ladies' gallery, where with a powerful opera glass she watched the speakers' lips and so followed the debate.

"Who is that girl you are always walking with, Daly?" said the Honourable George Towers, a genial young Tory with whom Gerald had grown intimate, leaning across the corner seat above the gangway to the corner seat below. "You know whom I mean, the girl with the wonderful amber-coloured eyes. Am I to congratulate you, old man?"

Gerald blushed as hot and as red as if he had been really caught in a love affair.

Towers was disconcerted at his confusion. "Beg pardon," he stammered out, "I did not know it was so serious. I mean I didn't think it was——"

"She's my sister," said Gerald, still curiously confused.

"And I'm a blundering donkey," said the Honourable George Towers.

But even this careless hint of love-making seemed to stir Gerald's blood with a strange new restlessness and excitement. The beautiful and beautifully dressed women that flitted on the big nights through the dim corridors and lobbies from the ladies' dining-room to

the ladies' gallery, had a new interest for him, a kind of pleasing terror that at once abashed and exhilarated.

Spring was merging into summer, and the young year made the young people impatient of the dingy city street, with a restless longing for fresh air and sunshine. They felt that their lives were overlooked by the growing crowd of visitors at the hotel, who divided themselves for the most part into two classes—the dull and the vulgar. The only taste of home they got was out of doors. They looked back with regret to their cosy little rooms in Dublin, and longed for some spot of their own from which they could bar the whole world out. Gerald grumbled a good deal; Grace said nothing. But she expressed her views more effectively by growing daily thinner and paler.

One morning at breakfast they were lucky enough to have the close, dingy little coffee-room of the hotel to themselves.

"I'm not going to stand it any longer, Grace," broke out Gerald. "It's bad enough for me; it's worse for you. When I see you drooping here, I feel as if I had the caging of a wild bird on my conscience. I'm sure we can easily get nice rooms a bit out of town for less than this hole costs us. I'm free up to three o'clock to-day, and I'm off to look for them. Would you mind if I shut you up in the National Gallery until I come back to report progress?"

"I'd just love it. You know I never tire of the

pictures. The very curves and colours of them delight me like a kind of pleasant taste or a delicate perfume. I fancy it's much the same kind of rapture that you get from what you call music."

"That's settled then. We'll have a turn in the Green Park until the place opens."

Gerald left Grace entranced before a hazy Turner, with colours like a soap-bubble to his untutored eye—

> "A landscape; foreground golden dirt,
> The sunshine painted with a squirt."

As he ran down the steps of the Gallery with the spring sunshine in his blood, a yellow 'bus came swiftly round the corner carrying his fate in it. With no thought that here was the turning-point of his life, he darted across the road and hopped on to the footboard.

"Room for one outside, sir," said the conductor, and Gerald was three steps up the spiral staircase when a glance inside stopped him and brought him down again.

There was just one inside passenger—a young girl, modest and pretty as a wild flower. The dainty figure and lovely face thrilled him with sudden rapture and recognition. It was as if some vague dream had come true. He seemed to have known her all his life, yet to see her now for the first time.

She turned half round for a second as he entered, and the blue eyes flashed one dazzling glance at him. Only one. The next moment the silken lashes

drooped on the soft cheek and the sweet face took on a look of pensive meditation in which his presence was quietly ignored. Women can do this kind of thing—men cannot. Right well she knew how he would profit by her unconsciousness. She felt the shy admiring glances that every now and again stole to her face. He trembled at his own boldness, but could not keep his eyes away. It was a good face as well as a beautiful—an attractive face in the truest sense of the word, a face to draw a man's heart to it as the honey-laden flower draws the bee, for the beauty that it shows and the sweetness that it promises.

So Gerald gazed his heart away, while Mademoiselle Demure in the corner sat with eyes cast down in sweet unconsciousness.

The 'bus had reached Maple's in Tottenham Court Road when the 'busman shouted at the door, "Fares ready, please," before he climbed upon the roof.

The cry startled her from her maiden meditation. She slipped her hand into her pocket amongst the flounces of her dress and drew it out again quickly with a little cry of dismay. Then she began untying a brown-paper parcel through which white lace blossomed as she opened it. This she searched in vain with eyes and fingers; then she looked on the seat beside her; then under it. She patted and shook her dainty dress—all to no purpose. The sweet lips began to pout and the blue eyes had a frightened appealing look in them.

Gerald watched this affecting pantomime in a very

agony of anxiety to help her, helpless himself from an overmastering shyness. The matter was so small, so easily remedied if he could only find the way.

The 'busman re-appeared at the door with the cry, "Fares, please."

Gerald had his inspiration.

"For two." He spoke to be heard, and motioned his hand towards the seat in the far corner, but kept his eyes away.

"The whole way, sir?"

"Yes, the whole way."

He got fourpence change for his shilling. Surely never in the history of the world did man buy delight so cheaply.

As the conductor passed out Gerald ventured a glance, and his heart beat double time as he met the timid smile of thanks that was waiting for him.

She glanced through the window a moment later, and leaped up hastily from her seat. With a softly-murmured "Thank you," and another grateful little smile as she passed, she tripped lightly down the steps of the 'bus and was gone. They were passing at the moment a pretty bow-shaped park, with trees and flowers in it. From where he sat Gerald could just catch a glimpse of the bright figure, dainty as Dresden china, that flitted round one horn of the crescent and disappeared.

He sighed a quick impatient sigh, and felt as if the sunshine had gone out of the day. She sighed, too, as she passed round the corner. It is curious that at

the same moment the same thought was in both their minds—they told each other so afterwards—"I shall never see her (him) again."

The little park, as has been said, was shaped like a bent bow. The 'bus line was straight as the taut string. When they got to the further tip, Gerald leaped out, turned round the curve, and walked back at a furious rate by the green railings under the shadow of the trees that leant their heads over it. He hardly knew what he hoped for; but he did know that he was bitterly disappointed when he failed to catch a glimpse of that dainty figure in its pretty Dresden china-pattern costume.

A number of narrow streets ran in on the crescent. He looked up and down them all in vain.

Flushed, excited, above all bitterly disappointed, he remembered at last the mission on which he was bent. At the moment he was right opposite the prettiest and neatest house in the crescent; a house with steps as white as snow and window as clear as diamonds. There were flowers on the window-sills and flowery creepers climbed on the iron trellis of the balcony, on which—French fashion—the drawing-room windows opened. "It is just the kind of house she ought to live in," thought Gerald to himself, before his eyes caught a neat little card with the word "apartments" over the fanlight.

His knock and ring brought to the door a gaunt, grey woman, who was fixing a very white cap on a very large head as she came up the passage.

She eyed him closely and, he thought, a little suspiciously. "Yes," she said curtly, "the rooms were still vacant, the drawing-room floor, bedroom at the back. Would he step in and look at them?"

So he stepped in. The place was not in the least like a lodging-house. It was as neat inside as out. The drawing-room was cosily, tastefully, even richly furnished, with a soft carpet and a profusion of easy chairs, with books in the cases and on the tables, delicate tinted porcelain on the chimney-piece and cabinets, and dainty coloured engravings on the walls. The bedroom behind, shut off by folding doors, was neat and snug.

"The rooms are too good," said Gerald with the frankness of youth, "and I'm afraid they are too dear."

"That's as it may be," was the curt reply.

"In any case I should want another bedroom; my sister lives with me."

"There is one vacant over this. It was Miss Dor——"

She stopped in the middle of the word, closing her thin lips with a snap. "You can see it if you like," she added after a pause.

He peeped in and saw a very pleasant room, upholstered in light blue, Grace's favourite colour, and looking out cheerily over the park.

"I am more than satisfied," he said, "if there is any one with whom I could arrange at once."

"You can settle with me. Martha is my name.

My mistress never interferes. I'm the housekeeper and cook as well, and I think I can make you comfortable if you are not too hard to please."

Then she named a rent so low that it startled him. "These are the terms," she said, "to take or leave."

"To take," said Gerald promptly. "Will the rooms be ready on Monday morning?"

"They're ready now, and they'll be ready then; unless they are taken meantime."

He was frightened at the mere thought of it.

"I'll have them right away," he said, and he slipped his card and a sovereign into Martha's hand.

For the second time that day, though he didn't know it, had fate befriended him.

"Eleven o'clock on Saturday," he said at the door-step to Martha, who nodded grimly without answering.

He ought to be quite satisfied, so he told himself again and again on his way back. But he wasn't. The rooms were charming. He had a delightful anticipation of Grace's delight when she saw them. But somehow that other beautiful face and that other graceful figure would keep mixing itself up in his thoughts with a vague sense of something precious lost.

"Why hadn't he spoken to her?" he asked himself angrily, over and over again. What a fool he was. She would surely understand that he did not intend any rudeness, that he only meant—then his reason asked abruptly what he did mean, and could get no

answer. So, much perplexed, he drifted on unconsciously through the crowded streets and came to himself with a start—when the 'bus stopped opposite the National Gallery.

He found Grace intent on a Landseer. She looked up brightly when he touched her shoulder.

In that first quick look she read trouble in his face. "So you failed," she said. "Well, don't fret about it. You could not hope to succeed right off. I should have gone with you instead of idling deliciously here. I'll go next time."

Gerald had a twinge of remorse for troubling her with his foolish trouble.

"Wrong," he said, stepping more into the light that she might see his lips plainly. "I have succeeded beyond my hopes. I have found a pleasant rural nest for my dear little town bird. You'll like it, I know. We migrate on Saturday morning."

Grace lightened with pleasure.

"Oh! I'm so glad. But why did your eyes tell my eyes fibs at first? You looked disappointed."

"Trust my lips then and not my eyes. Tell me on Saturday if I *could* be disappointed with the place even if I tried."

But he was disappointed all the same. That sweet face haunted him, with glimpses of sunny hair and soft blue eyes. The memory of her got between him and work or pleasure. His surface thoughts kept their old course. The barrel organ of daily routine rang the changes on the customary tunes.

Yet half-heard for the most part, a deep plaintive note sounded through all the racket of his daily life, and now and again his heart caught the note distinctly with a quick conscious pang of remembrance and regret.

Was it love at first sight he felt? Hardly that. But the live seed of passion had been sown in his heart to flourish or die as it should chance. It needed only the sunshine of her bright eyes to bring the seed to blossom and to fruit.

It chanced there was a Saturday sitting in the House, for Mr. Grandison punished the Tory obstructors as a school-master punishes unruly boys by cutting off their precious holiday. Gerald had only just time to settle Grace in her new home and hurry off to catch prayers and his seat in the House. He left her enchanted with the place, and beaming at Martha, who visibly softened at her delight.

"Too bad," grumbled Gerald, as he bade her "good-bye" on the door-step. "I cannot even get back to dinner. The Tories are wild at being kept in, and there's bound to be a row. I should not wonder if we had an all-night sitting. Sunday itself won't stop them in this temper. Anyhow, I shan't get back till midnight. The old lady has given me a latch-key. Do the best you can to-day, Grace, and we will have a real good time together to-morrow."

But it is the unexpected that always happens in the House of Commons. The angry Tories were melted by a few mellifluous words from the wonder-

ful old magician. They let a clause and a half of the bill through, and as a reward for good conduct they were dismissed from school before six. Gerald had a frugal chop and glass of lager beer in the House (the House is famous for its lager) mainly that he might tell Grace with truth that he had dined. Then he caught a 'bus and was at Sunbury Crescent before seven.

He slipped the latch-key quietly into the door and crept upstairs, delighted with the thought of Grace's delight. She was at the open window looking out on the pretty little park where the red light of the sunset still lingered. Though her face was turned half from him, he could see the pleased look on it. He came behind her lightly, as though she could hear, and slipped his hand over her eyes.

"Dorothy," she guessed promptly, catching at his fingers. His hand fell from her eyes, and turning round quickly Grace laughed outright at the look of blank surprise on his face.

"I'm Dorothy, am I?" he asked bewildered; "well I'm sure I will make a very nice, well-behaved young lady when I get used to my new position in life. But tell me, for pity's sake, Grace, who was Dorothy before she was me."

"You should be highly flattered to be mistaken for her, even with my eyes shut. She's the dearest girl in the whole world. You know I'm not fond of new friends, Gerald, but we were fast friends in five minutes. She heard I was alone, and came in to ask

me to lunch in her own little snuggery (Dorothy is the mistress of the place, you must know), and Martha gave us—oh! such a cosy little lunch. Martha just dotes on her. She—that's Dorothy—told me her whole story. She has had a terrible time of it, poor thing. Her father was robbed and murdered in the strangest way in this very house. But that's years ago, and in spite of all her sorrows, she is the gayest, brightest, prettiest——. But you can judge for yourself, for she's coming to tea at eight o'clock. You may fall in love with her if you like; I'll give my consent beforehand."

"That's awfully good of you, but I don't feel in the marrying mood to-night, and I was hoping for a quiet evening, and perhaps a game of chess with your own old self."

"But Dorothy plays chess too, splendidly. She used to play with her father."

"Dorothy I'm sure is the very pink of perfection, but Dorothy is not Grace. There, don't look put out, Grace, I didn't mean to be cross. I'll be awfully civil to your friend, and get my small talk into working order for her benefit, unless you would rather have her all to yourself. If you would, say the word, don't mind me. I can run down to the National Liberal Club. I have a bit of work to do which I can do best in the club library, and I may as well get it over to-night as any other night—if that suits you best."

Grace's lips trembled, and the tears started to her

eyes. It was very seldom those lips or eyes were turned to Gerald without a smile. His heart smote him.

"I'll stay, of course," he said, kissing her on the forehead.

"And you'll be your own self? I do want you to like each other."

"I'll be anything you like, Grace. I'll fall in love at first sight, and go down on my knees to her, if it will please you."

Then they chatted for a while over the day's doings in the House. But Grace was restless, and after a little she slipped from the room and came back in a minute or two, smiling. At five minutes to eight she playfully set Gerald in a corner next the door that he might startle Dorothy when she opened it. "Like a Jack-in-the-box," he grumbled; but she only shook her finger at him.

From his corner Gerald heard footsteps come lightly up the stairs, and then a gentle little knock at the door. He whispered to Grace the one word "Dorothy," and Grace read the whisper on his smiling lips, and cried "Come in."

"Am I too soon, Grace?"

What a sweet voice it was! It went straight from Gerald's ear to his memory. He looked up quickly, and saw his vanished beauty there in the room, kissing his sister. She looked lovelier than ever, he thought, in a dress of some soft white stuff with little moss-rose buds scattered all over it. Round her

neck was a collarette of lace, clasped with a tiny pearl brooch. The soft cheek had a warm glow, and the blue eyes were all alight with pleasure. There was something a little wilful and wholly charming in the proud pose of that dainty head with its coronet of braided gold. A woman would have doubted if Grace had played quite fair with her brother; surely the enemy had got a hint beforehand. That charming costume was not meant for feminine admiration only.

While the girls embraced, Grace cast a look—half inquiringly, half triumphant—at Gerald. But he had eyes only for Dorothy. Was it some occult power in his admiring glance that made her turn her head so quickly? The instant their eyes met she remembered him, and started and blushed ever so prettily.

But to Grace the start and blush were part of the programme. "Miss Merlyn, my brother Gerald," she said, and then their hands met in a friendly clasp. Gerald held the warm little hand a second longer in his own than formality prescribed. There was no mistaking the look of pleasant recognition in both faces. Grace's eyes were quick at such reading.

"Why, you have met before," she said. "Why didn't you tell me, Dorothy, that you knew him when I——"

"Because I didn't know that I knew. I could not tell that I saw him," Dorothy murmured in pretty perplexity a moment. But only for a moment; the next she smiled saucily and self-possessed.

"I suppose I was nervous about meeting a creditor, Grace," she said. "I owe Mr. Daly fourpence," and she flashed a look, half-gay, half-grateful, altogether betwitching, at Gerald as she said it. "Indeed, indeed I am really very glad to have the chance of thanking you. I was nearly distracted when you came to the rescue. I never could have faced the conductor."

"Please don't talk of such a trifle," said Gerald.

"It was a very big thing to me at the time. I would have given my little finger for fourpence."

"I was lucky to have the chance of helping you so easily."

"If you won't have thanks, you must have back your pennies," and she made believe to fumble for a pocket away among the muslin flounces.

"Well then, thank me as much as you want to. Shake hands once more over it, and we'll cry quits;" and again the little white hand met his confidingly, and again his heart thrilled with the soft warm touch of it.

Grace had turned from one to the other, watching the words on their lips with blank bewilderment.

"For pity's sake," she said at last, "what is all this about? Do tell me, Dorothy. Here you and Gerald are talking like old friends, and I thought you did not know each other's names a moment ago."

"No more we did, dear," said Dorothy, slipping past Gerald and dropping down beside Grace on the

sofa. She was more fluttered than she showed, and was glad to get Grace between them.

So the girls tangled their arms round one another and fell to talking, girl-friend fashion, ignoring Gerald, who was nothing loath to be ignored and watch them.

When Dorothy would have stooped to whisper her story, Grace caught up her face between her hands.

"My ears are in my eyes, dear. It is so hard to remember. Whisper as low as you like, but whisper to my eyes, please."

So the story of the 'bus adventure, her perplexity, her rescue were told.

"I was sorry to think I would never see him again. I am glad to have the chance of thanking him," Dorothy whispered, so that only Grace's eyes heard.

"Oh! now I know," Grace began, "why for the last few days Gerald was so——"

She broke the sentence off there. But Dorothy's instinct finished it, and she felt a pleasant little glow at her heart to think that he too had been troubled by the meeting and the parting.

The girls' talk was broken short by Martha with a dainty little supper, specially prepared for "Miss Dolly" and Miss Dolly's friends.

What a delightful evening it was in that cosy drawing-room, an evening to be looked back upon with a curious mingling of pleasure and regret; one of those bright spots in the journey of life that shine with their own sunshine through the mists of memory even when clouds are darkest.

They grew to be friends almost at once. They were all three so much alone in the world; Dorothy loneliest of all. Grace coaxed her again to tell her blood-chilling story of her father's murder. Gerald, even when his sympathy was keenest, could not keep back the thought what a thrilling romance it would make, if that flushed, frightened, beautiful face and that soft faltering voice could be put into print, and a dramatic clue and climax found for this baffling tragedy.

She was almost in tears at the close. "We have never entered the dreadful room since," she said. "It's just the same as when——" She grew pale and faltered at the remembered horrors of that day, and Gerald felt ashamed of his passing thought, and forgot the incipient author in the incipient lover.

But Grace coaxed and petted her back to cheerfulness. Finally Gerald got out the carved chessmen, which were amongst the many pretty nicknackeries in the room, and the wide chequered board, and challenged Dorothy to a game. "Grace says you are a champion, and I want a lesson."

There was a touch of confidence in his voice which made Dorothy smile to herself as she deftly set the white men in their places.

Gerald fancied himself at chess. He could hold his own with the best of the legislators at the one game which is allowed within the austere walls of St. Stephens. But Dorothy, taught by a master, could teach him the game. While he was devising a

brilliant onslaught with his queen, that dashing Amazon was betrayed into an ambuscade and fell an ignominious victim to a pawn. He had not recovered the shock of this unexpected disaster when Dorothy murmured demurely, "Mate in three moves," and the game was over. It is a strong proof of his infatuation—as all chess-players will confess—that he was able to laugh at his own defeat. From that they fell talking—all three—with the frankness of children, of the past and future, and planned a pleasant future together as if they had been life-long friends.

The time went by on wings. The little cuckoo from his sentry-box over the rustic clock startled them with twelve shrill cries as they were planning an early visit to the House. Dorothy leaped up declaring that "it was all hours." She kissed Grace "good-night," and nodded gaily to Gerald with one quick glance of those laughing blue eyes, that went straight home to his heart.

The pleasant poison of that glance was in his blood and kept him restless and sleepless far into the night. The remembrance of her face and voice and the soft touch of her hand thrilled through him with a rapture that was dashed with fear. He was full of the deep humility of true love with which vague hopes battled bravely. She was too bright, too beautiful, too perfect for him. But life without her seemed such a blank, he dared not despair.

He remodelled his future life for her sake. He would write great books; he would make great

speeches; he would win fame and fortune, and then perhaps— That "perhaps" never took definite form in his mind. Under its soothing influence he fell fast asleep, and awoke next morning to find a new sun shining in a new world, and a new life filling his whole being with hope and happiness. And yet it all meant only this—he would see Dorothy Merlyn again. The whole world was as desert weighed in the balance against one fair-faced girl. Folly! Yes, but what has Wisdom half so precious to offer her votaries? Why try to find new words for the old story—Gerald was in love!

Fortune favoured him that bright spring morning. Through the window of the front room he caught a glimpse of his sister passing down one of the shady walks in the crescent-shaped park, and beside her another figure that in an instant drew him from the window to the railings of the park. He had no key, but the eight-foot fence was no hindrance to one who had taken a hawk's nest in the tallest and smoothest tree in the woods of Loughile. The young legislator overperched the spikes as lightly as an orchard-robbing school-boy, and dropped noiselessly on the grassy margin within. The girls were in front, mingling hearts as girls will in a gush of innocent confidence. Their voices, fresh as the twittering birds in the branches, sounded pleasantly in Gerald's ear as he came up the shady walk behind them. Grace of course heard nothing, but her quick eyes noted the blush that lightened in the other's cheek. Some

instinct told Dorothy the footstep was his; the same instinct helped Grace to read her thoughts.

"Let us turn, Dorothy," she said, and turning they met Gerald face to face, dazzled by Dorothy's beauty as if he had never seen her before. Her brightness so abashed him with the remembrance of his own presumptuous hopes that for a moment he could find no word of greeting. Then he murmured some commonplace about the beauty of the morning, and walked beside the girls in awkward silence. His shyness made her shy. The pleasant comradeship of the night before was quite gone, a chill reserve was in its place which Grace tried in vain to dispel. When they parted at the door he felt he had fallen back in her regard from friendship to mere acquaintanceship.

"What a dull dolt I am," he thought bitterly, "what a dull dolt she must think me." Poor boy! he was little versed in girls' thoughts.

CHAPTER XVI

'THIS SENIOR-JUNIOR, GIANT-DWARF, DAN CUPID'

"All thoughts, all passions are delights;
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of love,
And feed his sacred flame."

COLERIDGE.

THE next day he did not see her at all, nor the next, nor the next. Three long days lost out of his life.

"Grace," he said after breakfast the fourth morning with elaborate carelessness, as he was starting for Westminster, "I'm not very busy to-day. If your friend Miss Merlyn would like to come down with you to the House at about two o'clock, I think I could find time to show her over, and we could have tea on the terrace afterwards."

Grace listened demurely with lips tight closed, though a laughing dimple might have betrayed her if he looked—but he didn't.

"I'm sure she would love it of all things. Like most Londoners she has never been there in her life. But are you quite sure we won't disturb you, dear?"

"Quite," and he was gone down the stairs four steps at a time with hot impatience throbbing in his heart.

He was not accurate in his assurance to Grace. The thought of that visit did disturb him most confoundedly. He could not settle down to work of any kind. He tried to write in shorthand the rough draft of a story he was attempting for one of the magazines. But he never afterwards could decipher those erratic symbols. At last he gave up in despair and prowled about from the library to the reading-room and from the reading-room to the central lobby, fiddling with books and newspapers, and cursing the slowness of the clocks. It still wanted a quarter to two, when a policeman in the lobby saluted him.

"Ladies for you, sir," he said, and handed him a card with Grace's name on it.

Gerald rushed away bare-headed, for his hat was sentinel to his seat.

He found them—a little speck of light and colour in vast Westminster Hall.

Dorothy was radiant in the gay dress and sailor hat in which he had first seen her, with a bunch of pink ribbon at her throat. Love lives on trifles. He had a foolish pleasure in the thought she wore it to please him. Her presence so absorbed him that he did not notice at first that there was a third lady of the company. She was a gay fairy-like little thing, yet with an assumption of old-womanly demureness. Gerald thought for a moment she was a particularly

bright child. But the vivacity in her eyes quickly undeceived him.

"I ventured to bring a friend, Mr. Daly," Dorothy said; "she was so anxious to come, and your sister said you would not mind. Let me introduce you, Mr. Daly, Jenny—I mean Miss Bligh."

"Jenny will do very well, my dear," said the winsome little lady. "Nobody ever calls me anything but Jenny Bligh, and I hope they are not going to begin now that I am a New Woman and am gone on the Press."

"Gone on the Press?" said Gerald smiling. "We Press men should be flattered, I'm sure."

"Oh! I don't mean that. Dolly knows what I mean. I'm going to be a reporter, and do speeches and special telegrams and things, and interview people, and go to the theatre without paying, and all the rest of it. I will interview you some time, Mr. Daly, if you let me. It would read first class, 'Distinguished Irishman—His Views of the Situation.' There seems always to be a situation and people are having views on it."

"Shall we begin at once, Miss Bligh? I have got a choice assortment of views on stock."

"Oh! no, not yet, because I cannot write shorthand quite well enough. I can only do thirteen words a minute. I timed myself the other day with a stop-watch. Only three of the words were wrong according to the book."

By this time they had got to the central lobby.

Miss Jenny Bligh was clearly determined to monopolize Gerald, and he did not like it. She was as pretty as a flower and as gay as a lark. But the time comes when there is but one charming girl in the whole world for a man—and all the rest bores. He was getting a little short in his replies to Miss Jenny's animated and incessant questioning, when he saw Dorothy turn on her friend a look in which affection and amusement were so wonderfully mingled that Gerald felt it an appeal.

Instantly Jenny had a new interest in his eyes. He found answers somehow—grave or gay—for her eager queries, and a grateful smile from Dorothy was his all-sufficient reward.

"So this is the lobby, is it?" said the newest of New Women; "and what's that little door at the corner where I see so many nice-looking men go in and out?"

"That," said Gerald, suppressing a smile, "is the bar."

She was full of excitement at the word.

"Oh! the Bar of the House. I have often heard of the Bar of the House. Isn't it there the culprits have to stand?"

"Yes," said Gerald, biting his lips, "it's there they have to stand."

"Poor things! And they sometimes what you men call 'get it hot.'"

"Hot and sweet."

"Oh! I must have just one peep."

They were walking towards the corridor that led to the library. She swerved a little from Gerald's side and peeped in at the door of the bar.

There were two young legislators having a split brandy and soda at the moment. One, a handsome young fellow, was lounging with his elbow on the counter and his face to the door. His honest brown eyes met hers full as she peeped in. It would be hard to say which was the most embarrassed.

"Hullo! Towers," cried his companion, seeing his face, "what's come to you now?"

"Oh! such a pretty girl. An 'airy fairy Lilian' sort of girl. She must be a Good Templar or Band of Hope angel, or something of that kind. She looked so shocked at seeing us perpetrate the iniquity of brandy and soda. It was your fault, old fellow. You tempted me and I fell. I never do this kind of thing as a rule."

"Oh! of course not, no one ever does. But you prove the rule by a great many exceptions. There's no harm done this time. There goes your girl with your rebel friend, young Daly. You can get introduced and apologize and promise to be a good boy for the future, and 'Drink to me only with your eyes,' and all that sort of thing."

Towers made a laughing reply, but he thought the suggested introduction a very good idea indeed. "I'll chance them on the Terrace later on," he said to himself as he sauntered out, leaving his brandy and soda unfinished on the counter.

Jenny got back to her party, not a little flustered by her adventure. "For shame, Mr. Daly," she said, "how could you send me over there?"

"I didn't send you."

"But you let me go. It's the same thing. I'll never speak to you again as long as I live. Oh! do tell me who is that man just coming out of the door?"

She was looking the other way herself, and seemed to have seen Towers with the back of her head.

"Oh! not there," she said, as Gerald vainly followed the direction of her eyes. "Right behind you—that tall fine-looking fellow."

"Jenny!" cried Dorothy, shaking a warning forefinger at her, for Jenny had the same fancy for 'tall fine-looking fellows' as had old Frederick William of Prussia.

"Oh! it's all right, Dolly. It's strictly professional, you know. Press people are bound to make themselves acquainted with distinguished personages—aren't they, Mr. Daly?—and he looked so clever, I'm sure he must be somebody."

"Somebody? certainly. Indeed, spiteful little chaps say all body. But that's a libel. There's not a decenter fellow in the House, Miss Bligh, than the Honourable George Towers. He couldn't do a mean thing if he tried any more than a mastiff could crawl into a rat hole. As to cleverness he knows what he means and says it, and that's more than most of them can do."

"I'll write a novel some day and put him into it as hero."

"Yes, do, Miss Bligh. You can make George Towers your hero, and trust him to keep straight and pull through from the first chapter to the last."

He caught Dorothy's eye fixed on him with such admiration shining in them that he broke off abruptly. 'Love me love my friend,' is a very good rule, but there are exceptions. It was all very well as far as Jenny was concerned, but he didn't quite want George Towers to be Dorothy's hero. How could he tell that he was helping himself, not Towers, in her regard? It was her delight in the honest warmth he showed in his friend's praise that made her eyes shine so. That was why she blushed as their eyes met, fearing he had read her thoughts.

"Who is that stately person in the sentry box?" she said, speaking to hide her confusion,—"there, with big gold chain and locket?"

They were at that moment passing into the House itself.

"Oh! that's the St. Peter of St. Stephens, whose duty is to let none by but the elect. He knows every member of the House as a shepherd knows his sheep. The electric light went out the other night, and we had to pass through in the dark like robbers to their cave, but he knew every man's voice."

"But what are all those silk hats for," interrupted Jenny, "and the tickets on them?"

There was a stirring debate expected in which Mr.

Grandison was pretty certain to take part, and the green benches were covered with rows of silk hats like the shelves of a shop.

Jenny stole over to one and read the ticket, "Perkins Smith, Prayers." "It's not a chapel—is it, Mr. Daly?"

Whereupon Gerald explained how devotion was encouraged in the House, and the good boys got good places.

"But those seats down by the big table have no hats on them, and they seem very good seats," said Dorothy. "Does nobody want to sit there?"

"There are men, Miss Merlyn, who would pawn their immortal souls for the chance of sitting there. There on your left hand are the seats of the ministers, and on your right the seats of the men who have been ministers, and mean to be again if they can."

"Where does Mr. Grandison sit?" Gerald was charmed with the eagerness of her tone.

"Just here, on the front bench opposite the big dispatch box. Are you one of his worshippers too?"

"Oh! I think him the greatest and best man in the whole world. Might I sit down in his place just for one moment? It would be a thing to remember and be proud of when I am an old woman."

"I'd rather sit in that grand chair up there with the carved back and sides," cried Jenny. "Who sits there, Mr. Daly?"

"The Speaker, Miss Bligh."

"The Speaker! Is that because he speaks more or that he speaks better than the rest of you?"

"Because he doesn't speak at all. You see we honour the virtue of silence, though we don't practise it much in the House of Commons."

He stole a laughing look at Dorothy. But Jenny's quick eye caught him in the act.

"Oh! that's a hit at me, is it?" she said. "But you need not make eyes at Dorothy, she knows I don't say half as much as I might, and she'd best not tempt me to."

Then the quick-witted, light-footed little young lady ran up the steps and threw herself into the deep, dark recess of the Speaker's chair, with her fairy-like foot sticking out over the edge. A very pretty picture the bright eager little face made, framed in darkness and carved oak.

"Wouldn't I just make a lovely Speaker, Mr. Daly?" she cried.

"Lovely is the exact word for it," Gerald replied, and there was a note of admiration in his voice that Dorothy didn't quite care for.

"You chatterbox," she said, "why, you could not hold your tongue for five minutes to be made Queen of England."

"Order! order!" said Jenny sternly. "Respect the chair."

"Tell me," she said, apropos of nothing, as she came tripping down the steps, "where does Mr. Towers sit?"

"Just here at the corner, close to the passage which we call the gangway."

"What a nice hat he wears, and what a nice hand he writes," cried Jenny, examining hat and card with undisguised interest.

"And you, Gerald, where do you sit?" interposed Grace.

"Here at this corner, the other side. We Nationalists sit below the gangway and the true blue Tories above it. But Towers and myself, as you see, can shake hands across the chasm."

"You're a Home Ruler, aren't you, Mr. Daly?" said Jenny, while she slyly pocketed the card with George Towers' name on it. "I am in favour of Home Rule too. I used to think it was treason and dynamite, but I've changed my mind. I have studied the question carefully. I don't like to come to any conclusion hastily."

"Since when has that happened you?" laughed Dorothy. "It was only the other day you were denouncing Home Rule, and denouncing me for having a good word to say for it. When you know her as well as I do, Mr. Daly, you'll know that she is never without convictions on any subject under heaven, and they are articles of faith to her—while they last. She is ready to teach politics to the Prime Minister, law to the Court of Chancery, medicine to the College of Physicians, theology to the bench of Bishops, and war to the Horse Guards; only she'd want to teach them a different lesson every day."

"Now don't be silly, Dorothy, when Mr. Daly and I are talking seriously. You mustn't mind her at all, Mr. Daly. She hasn't studied politics and cannot be expected to understand them. I always like to get at the root of things." She had got out a little gilt-edged red morocco note-book, and silver pencil case, and made ready to take an elaborate note. "I want you now to tell me how you decide—I mean divide."

"'Ayes' to the right and 'Noes' to the left," quoted Gerald, with a good imitation of Mr. Speaker Porte's sonorous voice. "Come along to the left and I'll show you the 'No' lobby." They passed out of the House behind the Speaker's chair and down the passage at the left. "The 'Aye' lobby is on the other side," he said, "a facsimile of this. Into one of those two all members are gathered by the Whips unless they escape in time. A man must vote if he hears the question put, and if he once gets shut in the wrong lobby he cannot escape it. The other day we caught an unfortunate Tory dosing on one of the benches and held him till the door closed. He gave his first and last vote for Home Rule."

Just at the exit from the "No" gallery, Gerald paused for a moment at a little table, tore a ballot paper from a bundle, wrote his name on it, folded it into as many corners as possible, and dropped it into a slit in a big mahogany box.

Miss Bligh watched him with her head a little on one side like an inquisitive bird.

"What are you doing now?"

"Balloting for seats in the ladies' gallery."

"The ladies' gallery? You have not shown us the ladies' gallery yet."

They entered the House again by the front door and stood at the Bar.

"You see that gallery there, straight in front, over the Speaker's chair?"

"How nice! It's the best place to see and be seen."

"No, not that. Over that."

She turned on him with comical indignation. "That place! That dungeon with the grating in front of it. You don't mean it, Mr. Daly?"

"Unfortunately I cannot help meaning it."

"If I weren't a women's righter already, that would make me one right away. Why do you do it?"

She turned on him as fiercely as a country magistrate on a convicted poacher.

"Oh! I say," he replied, with affected terror; "you know it wasn't I put the bars there. I suppose the notion was to protect the young legislators. Their heads could never stand the unshaded blaze of beauty. They were prudent old boys in those days. You know, Miss Jenny, that down in the mines they have to put a grating round the lights to prevent an explosion. It's the same here."

"Do you see that burnished spot in the dark grating," he said in a lower voice to Dorothy, "up there to the left side? The brass rods at that spot are burnished by the clasp of Mrs. Grandison's hand.

Behind that is her seat. She always comes down to the House when her husband has a great speech to make, to watch him and listen to him, and so the frequent touch of her fingers night after night for all those years has worn the brass bright. I have watched her face many a time as I sat at my work there beyond the reporters' gallery, and saw it brighten like a young girl's with pride and love while the House below her thundered with applause. What a wonderful thing it is, Miss Merlyn, a love like theirs, that has warmed and brightened two lives for fifty years. You know those lines of Moore's, don't you?

"'Calm wedded affection, that home-rooted plant,
That sweetens seclusion and blooms in the shade;
That feeling, which after long years have gone by
Remains like a picture we've sat for in youth,
Where e'en, though the flush of the colours may fly,
The features still live in their first smiling truth.'"

Unconsciously to himself, some of his passion made itself heard in his voice.

Dorothy felt the note of personal appeal in the lines with a responsive thrill that was half pleasure, half fear. She was silent and confused for a moment. But Jenny came to the rescue gallantly.

"I'm sorry to interrupt the poetry, Mr. Daly, I'm passionately fond of poetry myself; but I'm dying to see the House of Lords. I think they ought to be abolished at once, don't you?"

But when she got into that great Chamber, resplendent in scarlet and gold, with its noble pictures

and glorious windows, she quite faltered in her revolutionary resolves. She was delighted as a child with the beauty of the place. She had to sit on the broad crimson bench they call the woolsack, with the fat little cushion at her back, and even hinted that Gerald should lift her over the spiked railing of wrought brass to the vacant throne, when Dorothy interposed.

"The Queen's Robing Room," where the Queen never robes, with its polished and tesselated floor, suggested no more reverent notion to Jenny than, "Oh! what a splendid place for a dance!" Thereupon she flitted round the great Chamber light and bright as a sunbeam, humming a fragment of a waltz in a voice clear and joyous as a bird's in the spring time.

As they were coming back through a long dark corridor, with a glass door at the end of it, an electric bell began to ring—here, there, and everywhere, all over the place. Jenny, who was a little ahead of the rest, called out in a fright—

"Oh! do look at that poor man. I'm sure he is going to have a fit."

It certainly looked like it. The great red-bearded policeman stationed just beyond the glass door seemed suddenly taken with a convulsion of some kind. His whole body was contracted, his knees bent, his hands doubled up tight, and his mouth opened wide. All at once a roar rang through the building that shook the windows and made the ladies jump.

"Spea—ker!" yelled the policeman, with the full force of mighty lungs.

"Look," whispered Gerald, and the ladies looked with all their eyes.

There swept by a procession that seemed a glimpse of the middle ages. The Speaker moved at its head, stately, austere, in a great bee-hive wig and flowing black robes. Behind him came the Sergeant-at-Arms, in antique dress of black silk and white lace, sheathed rapier at his side, and the huge gilded mace (the "bauble" which Cromwell had apostrophized so contemptuously) over his shoulder. The Speaker's chaplain in robes and bands represented the spiritual element in the ceremonial.

They followed the procession amid the deafening cries of "Spea—ker! Spea—ker! Hats off, strangers," and saw it vanish within the carved door of the House, which closed behind it.

A minute or two later, when prayers were just over, Gerald left the ladies for a moment and stepped in through a side door, rescued his hat, and secured his seat for the day.

"What are they at now?" said Jenny.

"Questions," answered Gerald. "Oh, I don't mean anything personal," as Jenny pouted prettily. "The Ministers are saying their catechism. You're longing for a peep, I know, Miss Bligh. You must have it. You see that little niche at the narrow window beside the door on the left-hand side. That's the one spot in the whole place sacred to the lady visitor. There

is a kind of little step there on which you can stand and peep through. Only two are allowed at a time. Who'll go first?"

"Let Jenny go," said Dorothy, "or curiosity will kill her."

"I'll go in with Miss Bligh," said Grace.

For one second, such is the abyssmal dulness of man, Gerald felt hurt that Dorothy should be denied the place of honour and that Grace should desert her friend. But the dimple of a suppressed smile on Grace's cheek quickly enlightened him as to the meaning of her choice.

"You don't mind waiting, Miss Merlyn?" he said, "we'll be back in a minute."

It is to be feared that he was a little absent-minded in his reply to Jenny's gush of questions. Anyhow, she got men and names into her head in a wonderful jumble. Mr. Golfour, who sat with his boots on the table, she gathered was his own uncle who had casually turned in from the House of Lords.

"But I didn't think it was allowed, Mr. Daly?"

"Oh yes, certainly. You can put them where you like," Gerald answered absently, as he lifted her lightly from her perch. "Your turn now, Miss Merlyn."

He could hardly keep his voice steady. There was no lack of eagerness, nor of patience, when he helped her to her place.

"Is Mr. Grandison there?" she whispered, after

the first look at the crowded assembly beyond the glass door.

"I'll see." He swung open the door and walked into the 'House' to have a better view. "Yes, in his own seat that I showed you. I'm afraid you cannot see him very plainly; that tall man with the tall hat is between you. Now you can just see the top of his white head behind the other's shoulder. Allow me."

He stepped up on the perch beside her. There was very little room. His hand touched her hair as he pointed, and the touch sent a little tingling shock through him as if she were charged with electricity.

"There, now you can see his whole profile. By Jove! he is up, he is going to speak."

The old man was on his feet, face and figure graceful and stately as ever Grecian chisel cut in white stone.

A pert little Tory member—Mr. Starling—who fancied himself as a humourist, had asked some flippant question of which he had given private notice. They could not hear of course in their niche, but they could see very plainly from the dim recess into the light beyond. So impressive were the old man's gestures that his whole body seemed to speak. A smile full of mocking playfulness wreathed his face. He seemed to enjoy the fun like a high-spirited boy. The pert self-complacency in Mr. Starling's face changed to sheepish annoyance as the keen ridicule pricked him, and the whole House, without

distinction of party, shouted with approving laughter at the alert dexterity of its chief.

"How I should love to hear him in some great speech," whispered Dorothy.

"So you shall," said Gerald, ready at that moment to sell his immortal soul for a ticket to the ladies' gallery.

He found it a very pleasant little nook where they stood, dark in the midst of daylight, alone in a crowd. Their heads were of necessity close together, and they whispered softly as if they were in a church. There is something tender and seductive in the whisper of a sweet voice, no matter what the words may be.

So Gerald felt, at any rate. He was startled when another whisper in quite a different tone met his ear.

"Time's up, Mr. Daly," said one of the attendants. "There are other ladies waiting."

As he helped Dorothy down from the perch he may have held her warm little hand a trifle longer and tighter than was necessary. Still she did not seem to notice it, and yet Miss Dorothy was not usually an unobservant young lady. But she did blush when Jenny greeted them in the lobby with the words—

"What a time you two have been."

Grace came to the rescue.

"Miss Bligh has managed to enjoy and employ herself while we waited. Your friend, Mr. Towers,

Gerald, has been hovering about like a big bumble-bee round the honeysuckle."

"Nonsense," cried Jenny, quite tartly for her. "I'm sure I never noticed him."

Just then the Honourable Mr. Towers again hove in sight, and passed them quite closely, lifted his hat with a petitionary smile in response to Gerald's salute.

"He is very handsome and manly-looking," whispered Dorothy. "You were quite right, Jenny; he is wonderfully handsome."

"I don't think so at all now," Miss Jenny retorted saucily. "He is like a mountain. Distance lends enchantment to the view. Seen close at hand he is only just a great big plain heap of a man."

Dorothy and Grace interchanged a quick glance of amusement. They understood.

But foolish Gerald felt a keen little pang at Dorothy's outspoken admiration, and at the unmistakable longing in Towers' look. Of course that meant Dorothy—who else could it mean?

He was glad to get the girls down to tea on the Terrace, at a well-covered table set by the bright, flowing river, with its bewildering throng of dainty little boats and big lumbering barges. But a cloud fell on his enjoyment in spite of the bright spring sunshine when Towers went loitering by with a cigarette between his lips, and making a very poor attempt to look unconscious.

When at last Gerald saw the girls off in a hansom

—Jenny insisted on a hansom—the first person he met on returning to the lobby was Towers. He was much less cordial than usual in his greeting, but Towers did not seem to notice it.

"Who are the girls, Daly?" he said, coming straight to the point with his customary frankness. "I know your sister, of course. But who are the others? I wish you would introduce me to the little one some time or other, if you don't mind. By Jove, she's a stunner. She looks right through a fellow without seeming to see him."

From which it would appear that Miss Jenny had used her eyes to some purpose.

"I'll introduce you right enough," said Gerald, with a sudden accession of cordiality; "that is, of course, if Miss Bligh has no objection. Miss Jenny Bligh is her name."

"And the other rather nice-looking girl that was with her?"

"Oh, she is a Miss Merlyn; a friend of my sister's."

"And a friend of your sister's brother," laughed Towers. "I have eyes in my head, old boy, as well as another. Take care, Daly; you are close to the great fall. Watch and pray, or over you go."

Gerald tried to parry the point of the jest with a poor *tu quoque*. But he knew he had gone over the great fall. There was only the one thing in the world now worth watching and praying for—Dorothy Merlyn's love.

CHAPTER XVII

LAW MAKING AND LOVE MAKING

"Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands;
All the moments, lightly shaken, ran themselves in golden sands.

Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of sight."—TENNYSON.

HIS customary good luck failed Gerald in the ladies' ballot-box. The cunning, many-cornered ballot papers with which he tempted fortune day after day evaded the drawer's fingers, while a single paper which Towers casually tossed in as he passed the place, came out triumphantly as a double ticket. Gerald searching for his own name read his friend's in the list of successful competitors that hung over the ballot-box.

"I see you have got a ticket for the ladies' gallery for Monday, Towers," he said, leaning across the gangway at question time; "could you——"

Towers' face fell. A ticket for the ladies' gallery for a big debate was a precious privilege,

"I want very much to bring the little girl I had here the other day," Gerald went on cunningly.

Towers' face brightened.

"Certainly, my dear fellow, I will be most happy to oblige you."

"But we will want another half-ticket," said Gerald. "Miss Bligh will hardly come without my sister and her friend."

"That's all right," said Towers, "I know a fellow that will stand a half. He will be only too happy to swear he has only an order for one. He does not want the chaperon." Then after a pause, "You'll introduce me, Daly, won't you?"

"If you can dine early and dine plainly," said Gerald, "come down with us at six. That's settled? I'll book a table at once."

The ladies were in luck. Monday was the closing night of a big debate. There was to be a bombardment of the great guns from the front benches and, best of all, Mr. Grandison was to close the battle.

They were down early, all agog with excitement, and got good places in the second row of the ladies' gallery, only a few seats from Mrs. Grandison herself.

Gerald dawdled beside Dorothy until the inexorable division-bell carried him off.

After a bit the debate grew lively and the girls settled down comfortably to enjoy it. Jenny was silent for nearly five minutes, then she broke out.

"Oh! those detestable bars. I can only see what the photographers call a 'three-quarter face' of any

of the men. Lend me your glass, if you don't mind, for one moment, Miss Daly. I can stick the thick end through the bars."

She gave a cry of delight and almost dropped the glass through the grill on the bald head of a reporter below. "Wonderful," she exclaimed. "It brings them right up to the gallery. I can count the wrinkles on Mr. Grandison's cheek, and the hairs in Lord Grandolph's beard. I'm almost ashamed to look. It seems rude to stare at them so close. Wherever did you get this glass, Miss Daly?"

Jenny was sitting a little in the shade and Grace could not quite follow what she said. But Dorothy, who was close to the light, repeated her question.

"A present from my brother. It's aluminium, with ever so many lenses, very light and very strong. You see he wants me to hear with my eyes when we go to the theatre. I'm afraid it was very dear. He could get nothing in the shops to please him, and had this made specially for me."

Then Dorothy must have a peep through the glass too, and praised and wondered at it in her turn.

"How lucky you are to have such a brother," she whispered noiselessly to Grace.

But it is doubtful if she really wanted Gerald—as a brother.

Their gossip was silenced by a sudden silence that had come upon the House. All three looked out in surprise. Mr. Grandison was on his feet. Curiosity grew to excitement, excitement to rapture, as they

listened. The shouts of laughter, the thunders of applause made the air electric with enthusiasm.

"It's better than the opera," Jenny whispered, under her breath.

In truth, the charm of dramatic power and perfect music were not lacking. But there was something nobler than all these. In that great assembly whose passions swayed responsive to the old man's eloquence, there was no heart more moved than hers, whose ears were deaf to the music of his voice, who sat amid the growing tumult, girded by everlasting silence, and gathered the words from his lips before they shaped themselves into sound.

Hard on the speech came the division. The chamber, so full of life and sound at one moment, was silent and vacant the next.

Gerald passed into the "aye" lobby close behind the Prime Minister, who carried himself with the jaunty grace of an athlete.

The day had been one of incessant labour for Mr. Grandison. He had steered the debate through the quicksands of obstruction. The splendid vigour of his own speech might well have taxed the strength of a strong man in the prime of life. But he had no thought of rest. As he passed behind the Speaker's chair, he glided into one of the recesses of the lobby, and opening the little red dispatch box he invariably used, dashed off letter after letter with amazing rapidity.

So engrossed was Gerald watching him that he did not notice how rapidly the lobby was emptying. The

stream began to dwindle down to a mere trickle of loiterers and stragglers.

Suddenly the impatient cry of "Door, door," was heard from the tellers, thirty paces off.

Gerald with amazement saw the old man leap to his feet, clap the letters into the dispatch box, put the dispatch box under his arm and sprint down the vacant lobby with the light long stride of youth.

One of his letters had fallen to the ground and lay unnoticed in his haste, and Gerald picked it up and ran. He was at the Prime Minister's heels as he passed the tellers.

With stately old-fashioned courtesy Mr. Grandison took the letter from his hand.

"You have placed me under a deep obligation," he said. "Yes, the letter was important. It would be a grave injury to the public service if it had been delayed in delivery, or worse still, had reached unscrupulous hands."

As elated as a French recruit might have been by the Great Emperor's commendations, Gerald hastened away to carry the ladies from the gallery to the dining-room.

On their way Jenny turned to him with an air of the most amusing importance.

"Could I write a few lines, Mr. Daly? It is very urgent."

Dorothy laughed. "Press business, Jenny?"

"Yes, press business, Dorothy; most important

press business," and she pursed up her little mouth with an air of delicious gravity.

"Oh! the fate of nations at stake."

"Don't be frivolous, my dear. There's many a true word spoken in jest. Can you get me a sheet of paper, Mr. Daly?"

She wrote her letter in the lobby standing on tiptoe at the tall desk near the post-office, while the others stood waiting and smiling. Then she closed and sealed the document with portentous gravity. But she could not keep it up, and laughed like a mischief-making child, when she had dropped it into the post-office.

"That will be a startler for some people to-morrow," she said, as they walked down the long corridor towards the dining-room.

They found Towers waiting for them in one of the electric-lighted cellars to which the ungallant Kitchen Committee of the House of Commons relegates the ladies.

"Towers," said Gerald, "you know my sister. Mr. Towers—Miss Merlyn. Mr. Towers—Miss Bligh."

Jenny bowed demure and stately, as Towers, a little awkwardly, found a seat beside her. She was silent for a good six minutes—the longest break on record. Then the strain grew too strong for her and she overflowed with lively prattle.

For the time being she was an out and out Home Ruler, and she promptly indicted Towers for Coercion. Half amused, half confused by the attack, he answered

with the well-preserved party platitudes that saved him the trouble of thinking about the subject.

"Well, you see, Miss Bligh, the Constitution must be preserved at all costs, and the integrity of the Empire and—all that sort of thing. Home Rule is an unstatesman-like expedient, don't you see!"

"You don't call Mr. Grandison a statesman then, Towers," broke in Gerald laughingly. "You confessed yourself to-day that you had no one on your side that's a patch on him."

"Well, neither have you, for that matter."

"Yes, but we have him and you haven't, and that makes all the difference."

"He's a duck," said Jenny with decision.

"You're right there, Miss Bligh," assented Towers, with effusion. "He *is* a grand old man. But then you see he's old, and they have got no one to succeed him."

"Oh! not a bit of it," protested Gerald stoutly. "He is the youngest man in the House, and he gets younger every day. I tell you what, Towers, I believe his life has taken a turn and he is coming back the other way. He'll be playing cricket with our grandchildren when we are dead and buried."

Then he told the story of the race through the division lobby.

"He seemed highly delighted to have his letter back again. I wonder what was in it?"

"I think I can guess," broke out Jenny saucily. "You get the *Morning Header* to-morrow, Mr. Daly, and you will find it there."

"The *Morning Header?* I never even heard of the paper."

"More shame for you. It's nearly a month established, and I'm its special lady correspondent."

"Well, and what will I see in the *Morning Header* to-morrow, Miss Bligh?"

"Oh! I must not interfere with the sale of the paper."

"I'll pay the penny beforehand to its lady correspondent."

"Thanks. Well, you will see that Mr. Grandison intends to propose 'time closure'—whatever that means—to the Home Rule Bill debate on Monday next, and I'm sure that was what was in the letter he was so particular about."

Both the men were startled by this sudden announcement, for expectation was on tip-toe for the last fortnight on this very point.

Gerald looked at Jenny's face puckered into a frown by the gravity of her news, and then he laughed out loud.

"Oh! I see you're chaffing us, Miss Bligh," he said. "How in wonder's name could you know anything about it?"

"She told me," nodding prettily towards Grace, "or rather she told Dorothy, and I heard her. Yes; you need not be so surprised. She heard him—with her opera-glass you know—say to the great stout man beside him, when the fat red-faced man Mr. Partlett was roaring and flapping his arms, 'This is intolerable. I will move the time closure on Monday.' I took the

words down in my little note-book when Grace told them to Dorothy, and I sent off to the *Morning Header* as we came through. I'm so glad it's important."

Gerald was dumfounded for a moment.

"By Jove, you've done it, Miss Bligh," said Towers, with a comical mixture of dismay and admiration in his voice. "Our people would give their eyes to be sure of this beforehand."

"Then you go and tell them," said Jenny.

"But I cannot, you see," Towers tried to explain to the unconscious and unconscientious little lady. "It's confidential, you know. You had no right to hear—that is, Miss Daly had no right to see. It wasn't meant for you, don't you know; and, by Jove, you've got it and put it in all the papers." He let his dismay evaporate in a long low whistle.

"Oh! how could you, Jenny?" cried Dorothy reproachfully.

"Will it do much harm, Gerald?" asked Grace repentantly.

"That depends. You didn't say where or how you got the news, did you, Miss Bligh?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Daly," Jenny answered, abashed by the sudden scare, her lips quivering and her eyes misty with tears. "I only just put 'from our special lady correspondent,' that's all."

"Then there's no harm done. Nobody will believe the *Morning Header*, they'll think it mere gossip. Of course the paper will have a great crow when it comes true, but that doesn't matter."

Jenny clapped her hands, radiant once more. "And I'll get the credit of it," she cried, "and it will be what you call a 'stick' for the other papers, won't it, Mr. Daly, and make the editor appreciate me in future? He's just horrid sometimes. You remember that accident in the Thames the other day near Chelsea, when the lady fell out of the boat and would not let them take her back, but swam right across the river?"

Gerald nodded.

"Well, I was there at the time. I don't mean in the river, but on the bank. I wrote a beautiful description—especially the dresses. She looked so funny, poor thing, when she came out all dripping like a water dog, and the flower in her hat hanging right down on her nose. Well, it was printed—I mean the description—all right, and I called the next day, thinking the editor would be so pleased. But he wasn't, and he showed me my own 'copy,' and he had drawn a big blue pencil line under the words, 'She was one of four other ladies who chartered a boat to row to Chelsea.' I didn't know in the least what he meant by it, and I didn't like to ask. 'Chartered' is all right, isn't it?"

Towers bit his lips hard to keep a smile back. Gerald, after one laughing glance at Dorothy, gravely inquired—

"How many did you say were in the boat, Miss Bligh?"

"Why, four, of course."

"Isn't that a mistake? There were the swimmer, you see, and four others."

"I suppose that must be right," said Jenny, a little puzzled. "But I thought there were only four."

"Oh! now I see," assented Gerald; "I beg your pardon, you were quite right. The swimmer, as you say, was one of the four others."

"I knew I was right," said Jenny triumphantly, "and I don't know what our editor meant by his horrid blue line. But he'll be pleased this time, at any rate. You'll tell me some more secrets, won't you, Miss Daly?"

Grace shook her head, and Jenny turned plaintively to Towers—

"Isn't it too cruel for anything, just when I have a chance of getting on in my profession! She might spare me an odd scrap of news. No secret is safe from her. What a reporter she'd make! Oh, Mr. Towers, how I wish I had been born deaf and dumb."

This was too much for the Honourable George. He broke into a roar of laughter, which Jenny, after debating with herself for an instant whether she should be indignant or amused, gleefully joined.

In the very best of good-humour they all got back to the ladies' gallery. The debate renewed about ten, and was in full vigour at midnight. The twelve o'clock rule had been suspended, and obstruction was still rampant right on to the small hours of the morning. Mr. Grandison saw the fight out in the House and in the lobby, fresh and débonnaire to the last. Once Gerald, seeing him, long after midnight, standing in the lobby at the skirts of a dense crowd that

was oozing slowly past the tellers, offered him a seat. But the old man waved him aside with playful courtesy.

"It would never do for me to be an obstructionist," he said.

It was grey dawn when the stentorian cry, "Who goes home?" yelled through the corridors and lobbies by a score of voices, told the "House was up" at last.

Towers watched Gerald a little enviously as he helped the ladies into a four-wheeler, and slipped in after them. Jenny's vagaries had completed the big man's fascination. What in a man would have been dishonour was in her no more than the charming naughtiness of a pretty child. As he sauntered home in the fresh dawn, a new feeling began to stir in his heart as the birds were stirring in the trees at the promise of the morning. He wondered how Gerald could prefer that quiet Merlyn girl when such a bewitching little fairy was by, just as Gerald wondered how Towers could dream of comparing this gay little chatterbox to his peerless Dorothy.

It is lucky that things should generally so chance. "They needs must love the best who know the best," sings Tennyson. But then fortunately everyone has a best of his own. The old knight errant who insisted that the whole world should, on pain of broken bones, worship his best girl, was a fool for his pains. The world would be a lively place if he had his way, and he would have a lively time in it. But Nature is more considerate, and gives every true lover a first prize of his own.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM WORDS TO BLOWS

"And I'll tell in simple language what I know about the row
That broke up our society upon the Slannislow;
But first I should remark that it's not a proper plan
For any scientific gent to wale his fellow man;
And if a member don't agree with his peculiar whim,
To lay for that same member for 'to put a head' on him."

THE *Morning Header*, much ridiculed at first, had its triumph in due course. Mr. Grandison preferred his indictment against obstruction, and it was sentenced to the guillotine. The air of the House of Commons was electric with passion when at last the fateful night of the execution arrived. Again the benches, floors, and galleries were crowded. The debate gathered power and passion as it drew to a close. Cheers and counter cheers roared from the opposing benches like broadsides in a naval battle. Hotter and hotter became the temper of the House, while the clock's hands crept slowly to the appointed hour of ten.

In the midst of this seething excitement, Mr. Carlington, slim, sleek, neatly groomed, with a star of

white orchid in his button-hole, rose to conclude the debate. His voice was smoothly modulated, but there was a sting in every pointed sentence that pricked the fiery passions of the House like a spur to a high-mettled steed. At last the climax came. With mockery and malice in his soft sibillant tones, he insinuated comparisons between Mr. Grandison and Herod.

At the uttering of that word "Herod" the storm of passion broke loose, and the answering cry "Judas," "Judas," came back from a score of voices hoarse with rage.

Then followed a scene without parallel in the British House of Commons since the day when Cromwell filled the Chamber with armed men and carted away the Mace.

At that moment the hour hand of the clock touched the allotted hour, and Mr. Carlington dropped into his seat, smiling sardonically at the tumult he had evoked. The chairman rose to put the question, but his feeble voice was drowned in the all-prevailing din. On the Tory benches the figure of Mr. Hickery Dock was seen bare-headed, waving both arms wildly in frantic appeal to the Chair; but no word was heard. The question was put. Mr. Hickery Dock dropped into his seat, clapped his hat on his head as the quaint rule prescribes, and continued to yell in an inaudible protest through the tumult.

After the prescribed pause the question was put again, as before in dumb show, amidst the con-

tinuing storm, and the House was directed to clear for a division.

Then the Tory fury broke out in open rebellion to the Chair. They clung to their seats yelling in frantic defiance.

So far the violence was of voices only. But not for long.

A peaceful Liberal who had passed through the division lobby was surprised on his return to the House by the strange spectacle of the Tories still glued to their seats yelling vociferously. His curiosity drew him towards the vortex of the excitement on the front Opposition bench. There he was met by a furious cry of "Order! Order! Bar! Bar!" For it is disorder for any member not addressing the Chair to keep his feet in the House of Commons, except behind the Bar.

"I will put myself in order," he answered obligingly, and dropped into the vacant seat of the Leader of the Opposition.

That was the signal. The Tories flung themselves upon him in front and rear and hustled him with violence from the place.

The Irish benches rose to a man at the sight of the scrimmage and pressed in its direction, impelled, so far, rather by curiosity than anger. But the pressure from the rear pushed the men in front across the gangways into the Tory territory. The Tories leaped up to repel boarders. A tall gaunt Orangeman rose, livid with rage, and with clenched fist

striking out fiercely met an inoffensive Nationalist full in the face. The next moment a warlike colleague of this dazed victim struck back as fiercely. The blow caught the Orangeman under the jaw with a dull thud, that resounded through the House, and sent him sprawling amongst the benches. Then the passion that lies hid in every man's heart, the mad animal passion of fight, which civilization and convention may stifle but cannot kill, flared out. The legislators shouted and struck like corner boys in that savage *mêlée*. From the galleries the spectators, leaning forward, hissed furiously at the degrading scene.

Gerald Daly found himself in the very heat of the tumult, dazed by the suddenness of it. Across the floor of the House beyond the struggling mass of men, he had a glimpse of the pale and pathetic face of Mr. Grandison, old now for the first time, and haggard with humiliation, for the old man loved the House of Commons, and its honour was dear to him as his own.

For a moment it seemed as if the whole assembly must be swept into the growing tumult. Gerald caught the arm of his excited colleague as it was raised for a second blow. The man turned fiercely on him. But his anger died out at the sight of a friend's face. "You are right, Daly," he said shortly, and elbowed his way out of the throng with unclenched fists.

Gerald pushed his way into the heart of the tumult.

He caught sight of Towers on the Tory side and shouted and stretched a hand to him. Towers heard and understood. He grasped the stretched hand with a grip of iron, and the rigid arms of those two strong men made a barrier between the foes where the fight was fiercest, forcing them apart.

Then all at once the rumbling of the tumult ceased, and dead silence and something like awe came upon the assembly, and Gerald looked round amazed to find the cause of this sudden peace.

The facile Chairman of Committee had disappeared, and the stern Speaker of the House was in the chair.

Resonant and resolute his voice rang through the tumult, enforcing obedience to his will. Explanations were made and apologies were offered. In ten minutes the House showed no trace of the unparalleled storm that had for a brief space swept away the austere traditions of centuries.

As Gerald walked towards the door, while the tumult was still rumbling, he inadvertently put on his hat before he reached it. Instantly a cry of "Order! Order!" was raised by some members near, and an attendant at his elbow whispered, "Your hat, Mr. Daly, remove your hat, sir," in a tone of horror as if sacrilege had been committed. Then Gerald knew for certain that ceremony had re-asserted itself and the House of Commons was itself again.

Presently the dreary tramp through the division lobby began, as clause after clause of the Bill was put without discussion.

Never before had Gerald's capacity as a press man been put to so sharp a test. The account he had written of the earlier and calmer proceedings was now quite worthless. The newspapers he knew would find no space for anything except that free fight on the floor of the House of Commons.

While his heart still throbbed and his hand still shook with the fierce excitement of the scene, he had to make "copy" with the regularity and rapidity of a machine.

He got himself a seat close to the door of the "Aye" lobby and wrote with furious speed, three words to a line and six lines to a page, numbering the slips as he wrote, and tossing them when written into his hat. He was amongst the last each time to pass through the door where the whips stood sentinel. He was back again like a flash through the side door to his seat in the lobby. There was no time for choice of words or turning of sentences. The words came as they could, the sentences made themselves. His thoughts and his pen raced neck and neck along the paper. Yet in the midst of this breathless speed he had the pleasant consciousness his work was good. He felt his words would do their task, and his picture of that exciting scene would stand out clear and vivid from the paper. Half-a-dozen times he jammed the slips he had written into an envelope, ran upstairs and passed them in at the corner of the Reporters' Gallery where regiments of messengers are always waiting. When the last of

the many divisions was over at last, and the cry, "Who goes home?" again rang through the buildings, he had almost finished his task.

A hansom whirled him off at a dashing pace along the Embankment, up Norfolk Street, to the office of his paper in the Strand. He flew up the cork-screw staircase to the garret at the top, whence a special wire ran over long leagues of earth, and under long leagues of sea, right into the Dublin office of his newspaper. There he could talk to the editor in Dublin as men talk across a dinner table. The operator looked up as Gerald entered, and his fingers ceased on the clattering keys.

"Nearly finished?" said Gerald.

"Four pages of your copy left, sir."

"All right. I'll keep you going to the end. Ask how much they have got of the row, and how much more they can take."

The machine clattered again under the operator's fingers, and the message flashed over the silent land, and under the rolling sea.

"How much have you got?"

In an instant the answer came back—

"About three columns."

"How much more can you take?"

"About three-quarters, if you look sharp."

Again Gerald's pencil began to tear along the paper. He tossed each slip he wrote to the operator, and the words went clattering into Dublin at the rate of forty-five to the minute. The pencil and

machine stopped almost together. The hard night's work was done.

"Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

"I'll sleep well to-night," was Gerald's mental comment on the whole proceedings, as he threw himself into a hansom, exhausted with the reaction from the long strain. Even in that hope he was, as the event proved, beside the mark.

When he turned his latch-key and stepped quietly into the hall, he was surprised by a fluttering sound on the stairs. His surprise increased to find the sitting-room lighted, and Grace waiting for him, pale and anxious. But her face brightened at sight of him.

"Oh! you're welcome, Gerald," she cried. "Thank goodness you have got home safe. We were terrified."

She spoke loudly for her, and Gerald thought he heard again that mysterious flutter on the staircase.

"Why, Grace darling, what was to happen to me?" he said, "one would think I had been to the wars. What has frightened you?"

"That awful fight in the House."

"That what?" said Gerald. "In wonder's name how did you hear of it?"

"About half-past eleven, as I was sitting in my room, the news boys came roaring down the street, 'Special Edition. The fight in the House of Commons. Attack on the Irish members. Full list of the killed and wounded.'"

"But you could not hear that, Grace?"

"I didn't hear it, of course. I was told it," she went on quickly. "I was horribly frightened. We knew we would not get a wink of sleep, so we determined that we should sit up together and wait for you, and oh! we were so relieved when she—that is, I—heard your latch-key—I mean, when I found you were safe."

"You have got your pronouns a little mixed, Grace," said Gerald. "The 'we's,' 'she's,' and 'I's' are dancing a jig through the sentences; there must have been—Hallo! what's this?" he interrupted himself, as he picked a little worn gold ring, with two hearts joined, from the table.

He knew it well for a ring that Dorothy often wore. It had been her mother's and was too large for her, and she had a trick of slipping it back and forward over her slim finger when she was excited.

He held it up to Grace.

A soft light kindled in her eyes, half-playful, half-wistful. She stooped over and kissed him on the forehead as she whispered, "Of course, you goose, you might have guessed it. She was as anxious as I was, and we watched together till she heard you at the door."

So the sister betrayed her friend to her brother, and it is just possible that Dorothy herself would have pardoned the treason if she knew of it.

Gerald kissed his sister good-night with special tenderness. But more tenderly still he kissed the

morsel of irresponsive gold as he slipped it on his little finger "for safe keeping," as he told himself.

The clasp of it through the night fevered his blood with vague hopes and chilling fears. But when he slept at last, his soul grew bolder in its dreams, and he caught his sweetheart to his breast and pressed warm kisses on her lips, and claimed her for his own.

CHAPTER XIX

WOOING

"Learn to win a lady's faith,
Nobly as the thing is high,
Bravely as for life and death,
With a loyal constancy.
Lead her from the festive board,
Underneath the starry skies;
Guard her by your truthful word,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.
By your truth she will be true,
Ever true as wives of yore,
And her 'yes,' once given to you,
Shall be yes for evermore."

MRS. BROWNING.

THE ring went back next day to its owner, telling no tales of where and how its night had been passed, and Dorothy took it with a formal word of thanks that chilled Gerald's fervour in a moment and froze the avowal on his lips. For weeks after this she so managed that, though he saw her often, he never saw her alone. The world laughs at love troubles, but to the victim they are the one thing real in the world.

We remember how the lively Benedict in the play, when love captured him at last, could find no humour

in the jests of his companion. Even so with the diffidence of true love, Gerald feared the worst, yet resolved to know the worst. But Dorothy gave him no chance. There are delicate organizations that can tell when there is electricity in the air by some delicate antennæ of sensation. Even the most artless young girl knows when there is a love avowal coming, and avoid it.

Day after day Gerald suffered in love's fever the hot fits of hope and the cold fits of despair. He lived two lives—an outer and an inner. His work was done as hitherto, but was done without zest. It was done as in a dream. Even the fervour of political excitement was at times swallowed up in the deeper excitement of love.

His patriotic fervour revived, however, as the long and weary struggle in the House of Commons drew to a close. When the eventful night came at last, the hope and longing for his country's freedom, and the happiness of her people overflowed his young Irish heart and left no room for other thoughts.

All day there was that curious sense of strain and restlessness that is ever the herald of a great event in the House of Commons.

There was an undercurrent of impatience even in the applause with which stirring speeches were heard. The members that crowded the House, floor, bench, and galleries, were eager to come to close quarters in the division lobby.

When at last the final struggle was over, and

the tellers paced together through the throng up the floor of the House, there was a moment of profoundest silence. Every man in that great assembly held his breath to listen. All felt a turning point in history had been reached. In that awe-inspiring silence, the solemn verdict of the Imperial Parliament in favour of Ireland's freedom and nationality was pronounced.

Instantly pent-up excitement broke loose—the hopes and longings of years were in the passionate cheers that pealed from the Irish benches.

Gerald was still dizzy with triumph as he passed out into the cold night air. The excitement of the House had overflowed into the streets. A vast cheering throng had gathered in Palace Yard. English and Irish grasped hands in fellowship and gratulation at the ending of the long feud. All at once some one in the crowd struck up "The Wearin' of the Green," and at once it swelled to a mighty chorus, in which the Cockney accent and the brogue were strangely blended; and Gerald still heard the distant roar booming through the night air as he passed into Trafalgar Square.

There was a wild exultation in his blood as he struck out rapidly for home. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the pavement. He was hard put to it to keep from leaping and shouting as he went.

He felt that from the point that had been reached no turning back was possible. Struggles and troubles might be before them, but the final triumph was

assured. *Volat irrevocabile verbum.* The pronouncement of that night could never be recalled.

Then presently amid the triumph of his thoughts a soft whisper made itself heard, stilling the tumult, and once more love reigned supreme.

Two days later he was again lucky in the ballot for the ladies' gallery, and Grace and Dorothy were tempted to the House by false promises of an exciting day. It was a dreary debate on the estimates. The financial orators had for audience only the Chairman and the Sergeant-at-Arms. The members crowded out for the debates and crowded in for the divisions. Millions were voted away per minute, and on any one of those divisions, of which scarcely a man amongst them knew the purport, the fate of the government of the Empire might depend.

But if the House was deserted, the Terrace was crowded. It was a glorious day in August. All the rank and beauty and fashion of London seemed assembled on the broad sunlit plateau by the shining river. "Tea on the Terrace" had grown to be a favourite function of the fashionable world.

So, gaily enough for Gerald and his party, the day wore on to dusk. If the Terrace was pleasant in the sunlight—and it was pleasant—it was infinitely more delightful when the broad harvest moon rose over the city. Gerald had coaxed the girls down after dinner, and had secured a daintily-covered tea table, where the long shadows of the tall turrets fell back on the moonlit pavement.

They laughed and chatted about a hundred things. Dorothy was specially gay and unconscious. Yet all the time she knew well what was coming, and was longing to escape with a dim consciousness that she would cry with disappointment when the escape was effected.

A feverish impatience devoured the unhappy lover as the precious minutes slipped rapidly away and his hopes with them.

Grace thought—but what Grace thought is best judged by what Grace did.

The Honourable George Towers coming out to smoke a solitary cigar on the Terrace—he had grown very solitary in his habits of late—saw the group in the shadow, and came toward them at once.

It was the last straw that broke the back of Gerald's hopes. It is to be feared he spoke a swear word under his breath as Towers came on, smiling with serene unconsciousness through the moonlight.

Then Grace's sweet voice broke the silence.

"Oh! Mr. Towers," she said, "I have a special message for you from Miss Bligh. Come back into the light where I can see your answer, and I will tell it to you." And Grace—Grace the timid and demure—leaped up from her seat and carried the Honourable George Towers off with her down the Terrace.

They were alone, their hearts beating double time. His longed-for chance had come at last, and he was dumb. Dorothy kept talking without a pause for a moment or two, then she stopped, finding no other

word to say. She began nervously sliding the little ring on her finger, with her eyes resolutely cast down.

Often and often had Gerald pictured the scene to himself, but this was not at all like the picture. He was to lead up dexterously to the subject next his heart. He had planned what he should say, and what she would answer when the time came for speaking his love out boldly. He had got by heart the fervent, eloquent little speech on whose issue his life's happiness was to depend. He only needed the opportunity, he told himself. Now the opportunity had come, and the man was found wanting.

There was a pause of a minute that seemed an hour.

The lady recovered herself first; she always does. Dorothy, as the phrase is, "came up smiling."

"Well," she said, with a laugh in her eyes, though the tears were not far off, "I could not have believed it of Grace. Poor Jenny!"

Gerald refused to follow her lead.

"Miss Merlyn," he said, stiffly as a school-master, "I want to speak to you—seriously."

"Oh dear! What have I done now?"

The mocking look the blue eyes flashed at him for one half-second completed his discomfiture.

"Please don't laugh," he broke out plaintively. "I can't bear it. It is a matter of life and death to me. I love you, Dorothy. I cannot tell you—you cannot guess how much. Is there any hope for me?"

She was not laughing now. The long lashes rested

on the flushed cheek, and a tear trembled through the silken meshes. Her sweet lips quivered, but no words came.

"Speak to me," he pleaded, "give me some hope; one little word?"

Her hand lay white on the white cloth. He caught it in his own. The warm touch of it thrilled him as it lay in his strong palm like a frightened bird, making no attempt to free itself.

"May I?" he whispered, bending closer, holding up a little jewelled ring that sparkled in the moonlight.

She made no answer. Perhaps she did not hear, though their heads were very close together.

Very gently he coaxed the engagement finger apart, and was about to slip the tiny circlet of gold upon it, when suddenly the division bell broke out furiously.

He started at the sound, and the ring dropped on the table.

Then Dorothy looked up and shyly drew her hand away.

The night air palpitated with the impatient tingling of the bells, and the legislators were all scampering across the Terrace in answer to the summons. Still Gerald lingered. The fate of the Government might be at stake, but he lingered.

"Only a word, Dorothy," he pleaded insistently, "don't be so cruel."

"Oh, go, go!" she cried, "you will be late; leave me now, and when you come back, perhaps——"

He flew down the Terrace at racing speed, and up the stairs, and along the corridor, and through the lobby. He was the last man into the House before the inexorable doors closed. He was the first man out of the division lobby. In three minutes he was back again on the Terrace.

Dorothy had vanished, and Grace with her.

He stared at her vacant place in blank bewilderment and despair. She had fled from his love; that was his answer. The last glimmer of hope died out of his heart as his eye caught the yellow gleam of the little gold ring lying where it had fallen on the cloth.

Catching it up angrily to toss it into the river, he found Dorothy's own ring that he remembered so well, in his hand, and guessed at once the meaning of that precious token so shyly granted.

CHAPTER XX

IN DEEP WATER

"Who of its victim cheats the wave
Rescues his enemy."

THE sudden revulsion from blank despair made Gerald dizzy with delight. His heart throbbed with a fierce, intolerable ecstasy that was a kind of pain. He could not sit still. The tension of his excitement found relief in motion. A dozen quick turns up and down the Terrace, and he came again to his own corner and dropped into her seat with a full and blissful realization of his good fortune. A thousand visions of future happiness floated before him, vague indeed, but none the less delicious for their vagueness.

He was but half conscious of the scene around him. The cool touch of the night wind, the gurgle of the river pushed back by the impetus of a high tide, the broad band of moonlight rippling on its black waters, the great curves of Westminster Bridge, were all as things felt, heard, or seen, as in a pleasant dream.

Suddenly he started to his feet, tingling to his finger-tips with alert excitement. His eyes had rested

for a moment on the great bridge that closed his view of the river. In that moment a wild figure leaped to the crown of the central arch, paused for one long second with arms flung up, black outlined against the brightness of the sky, and then plunged headlong down. Sudden and silent as a vision the figure came and passed.

The soft love-thoughts fled from Gerald's soul like frightened birds. Clear thought and quick resolve were begotten of the sudden emergency. He flew along the Terrace at a speed its tesselated pavement had never known before. At the far corner he tore off his coat and boots and flung them with his hat upon the pavement. In his stocking feet he climbed over the stone balustrade, and bending forward peered out from the darkness into the moonlit water below.

There! there at last, right in the broad track of the moon, he saw a dark figure with arms tossing in frantic struggle, carried rapidly down the stream. One look was enough. He drew a deep breath, pressed his feet hard against the corners of the stone, and gathered his muscles together for a spring, then darted like an arrow from the bow, out and down. His joined hands hit the water first, and cut it like a knife. He was twenty yards from the wall when he rose after the first plunge. In his excitement the cold chill of the water was unfelt. As he rose he saw the struggling figure still swinging down in mid-river, and he struck out straight for it.

But the weight of the current pressed heavy upon

his breast. He moved by inches against the insistent pressure of moving water. So he turned, slanting down stream, set his shoulders sharp to the water, and with long, strong strokes raced athwart the struggling body that came straight on with the current. His shoulders ripped the water like a boat's prow. Nearer and nearer he came at each stroke, measuring the distance with quick eyes. The drowning man's struggles had ceased. The helpless body was rolled over and over by the stream. Gerald is scarce ten yards off now. With a fierce final spurt he turned half on his side and dashed through the water.

A cry of dismay rings out from the eager watchers on the Terrace. Gerald looked again and saw only the black surface of the water where the body had been a second before. As a seal ducks at a gun flash, he went under. Three strokes he took down through the chill darkness, straining his eyes. From a deeper depth there came a faint glimmer of white, and below it a blacker blotch in the black water. Four strokes more and Gerald's hand clutched the hair of the drowning man, full fifteen feet under the river. The body swayed lightly to his touch as he went plunging fiercely to the surface. One stroke—two—three, and still the inexorable water closed above his head. An iron band seemed to squeeze his chest. The exhausted air forced itself through lips and nostrils in a little bubbling stream. The strain grew to agony, when with one convulsive effort his head and shoulders shot clean up from the strangling waters into

the pure night air, which his lungs drank in thirstily.

He drew his ghastly burthen to the surface till the white face showed clear of the strangling stream. In limp body or ghastly face there was no sign of life. The thought thrilled through Gerald that his effort had been in vain—he had rescued a corpse. But he clung to hope. His breath and strength had come back to him. His heart began to beat more soberly. As he raised himself half out of the water to measure the distance with his eyes, a roar of encouragement broke out from the crowds already gathered on both banks of the swift-flowing river, and the human sympathy in the sound nerved him for a final effort. But the final effort was not needed.

A great barge came lumbering up the river against the tide with a patch of brown sail spread and two long oars flapping the water lazily. The man at the prow saw and shouted to him. Floating softly down stream to meet it, Gerald passed smoothly into the boat's shadow, and a rope splashed in the water close beside. He caught it as it fell, found the running noose at the end, and passed it over the head and shoulders of the rescued man—or corpse.

"Haul up," he cried, and the body went plunging through the water, and dangling through the air until it was drawn gently on board the barge.

Again the rope fell splash into the stream, and in another moment Gerald climbed on deck.

His first thought was for the unconscious body

which, stretched prone on the rough boards, was now being rolled and rubbed with hearty good-will by one of the bargemen.

"About boat," Gerald cried, as his feet touched the deck, "make for the hospital; it is his last chance."

They were now close to the bridge. He caught the nearest oar as he spoke, and put all the strength of his body into the pull. Three men straining together on one oar swung the heavy boat's head across the stream. The sail was shifted, the wind favoured them, the huge oars tore through the water, and in a minute the boat's side grated against the river wall. There were students from the hospital among the cheering crowd that waited for them. A dozen willing hands seized and carried off the unconscious body, still limp and cold as a corpse.

Cheering lustily, while answering cheers echoed across the river from the Terrace of the House, the great crowd followed the procession round the corner and up the street to the entrance of the hospital. Then amid a final hurricane of applause, the doors closed on the rescuer and the rescued.

Within the hospital all was quiet, dexterous activity. For there, night and day, incessant war is waged against disease and death, and come the enemy when or how he may, all is in readiness for his reception.

The unconscious body was carried to an inner room, where every appliance was at hand for its restoration. The house-surgeon followed it, beckoning two of his

senior students to assist him. The others gathered round Gerald with much hard hand-shaking and congratulation. Their admiration took practical form. One set a jorum of steaming brandy and water before him.

"As hot as you can drink it," he urged.

A second student—the biggest of them—appeared with a bundle of clothes under his arm, and flourishing a great rough towel.

"Peel off," he said authoritatively; "I'll do valet."

In ten minutes Gerald was rubbed and scrubbed hot and dry. He was seated comfortably dressed, with a second glass of brandy smoking beside him, when at last the house-surgeon came quietly back into the room.

A dozen eyes and half-a-dozen tongues questioned him eagerly.

"He'll do now," he answered, "it was a hard pull. He was half over the threshold of death's door, but he's coming back. You have not risked your life in vain," he added kindly to Gerald. "The man will live to thank you. Now take my advice, get home and to bed at once."

"Oh, I'm all right."

"All right now, but the chill and strain may tell later on. Off you go."

Hardly allowing him time to extract a damp card from his case, they bundled Gerald into a hansom, smothering him with rugs and overcoats.

The happiest man in all London whirled home in that hansom. "She will be pleased and proud when she hears," he thought, as he kissed again the ring that was the silent pledge of her love, and longed for its full avowal from her lips.

CHAPTER XXI

AS GOOD AS GOLD

"And so it was, half shy, half sly,
You would and would not, little one,
Although I pleaded tenderly,
And we were quite alone."

GERALD slept long and woke fresh, vigorous, and supremely happy, as all the stirring events of the night before came back with a rush to his mind.

Grace, waiting breakfast for him, was intent on the newspaper. She looked up as he touched her shoulder, and he saw tears of joy in those clear eyes.

"Oh! Gerald," she said, kissing him twice, "I'm so glad, so proud of you. The papers are full of it. She was in raptures when——; but I must not tell secrets. It is not from my lips you want praise most now."

Though the dearest wish of her heart was gratified in her brother's love for her friend, she sighed as she spoke. The first place in his heart was no longer hers.

In vain all through breakfast he coaxed her to tell

what Dorothy had thought and what Dorothy had said.

"No, no; not fair; you must get it first from her own lips," she answered. "Why, Gerald, now you are blushing just like a girl. 'Faint heart never won fair lady.' She is not as terrible as you think. I would not be altogether surprised if she half-expected a visit. You foolish boy, put down your paper, give politics a holiday, and go." She snatched the paper from his hand, and pointed playfully to the door.

"Go."

He walked down one little flight of three stairs, up another flight, and knocked very gently at the door of Dorothy's sitting-room. "Come in," said a soft, sweet voice, that set his heart beating furiously.

Surely Grace was quite wrong in her thought that he was expected.

Dorothy was gathered up on the couch, reading. She put down the newspaper, and sat up quite straight and looked at him, flushed and bright eyed. How lovely she was!—that was his one thought. Her beauty abashed him. It seemed to lift her beyond his reach. He dropped in a moment from the accepted lover to the distant worshipper.

Meanwhile bright eyes questioned him persistently why he came.

"Miss Merlyn," he said. He meant to say Dorothy, but for the life of him he could not get the word out. "Grace fancied you would——, that is——, I thought you might perhaps——"

Then she took pity on him.

"Mr. Daly," she said, with a little mocking emphasis on the 'Mr.,' "you quite startled me. I thought it was—Martha. But I am so glad to see you. I want to say how pleased and proud I—that is, Grace must be. Even *The Times* has a glowing account of it. See, I was reading it as you came in. Oh! it was terrible—glorious, I mean. I should have died with fright if I had been there."

Hope began to stir again in his heart.

"If it pleased you," he began.

"Of course I was delighted. All your friends must be delighted, and I hope I may count myself—a friend."

There was something of shy challenge in her voice that warmed his blood.

He looked at her hands. The right lay carelessly over the left on the cushion of the sofa. He could not see if the ring was there.

"Miss Merlyn," he began awkwardly.

"Well, Mr. Daly," she answered. "But I beg your pardon, won't you sit down?"

Her eyes motioned him to a chair at the far end of the room. It was too much. He sat down on the sofa close beside her.

"Dorothy," he whispered, "do you remember what I told you last night?"

"I only remember you ran away from me in a great hurry, and Grace and I had to leave just after that."

"What I said before I went—before you told me to go?"

She shook her head with a look of innocent bewilderment almost perfect—not quite. There was a traitorous twinkling in the blue eyes, a traitorous flush on the soft cheek.

Gerald caught at her left hand suddenly. She made a little struggle to hide it. Yes, his own ring glittered on the third finger.

It was enough. His right arm found its place round her waist. She surrendered at discretion. The lissom figure swayed towards him, all the laughter gone out of the eyes and passionate love shining there. The sweet lips met his frankly, as with one fervent kiss he claimed her for his own, and had his claim allowed.

She trembled and panted a little in his strong embrace; when she raised her face again it was quite pale, and her eyes were misty with tears.

"Do you really and truly love me, Gerald?" she whispered softly. In the very murmur of his name she seemed to claim him for her own.

"Really, truly, as no man ever loved before," (and he believed it,) "and you will trust yourself to my love, Dorothy?"

"I don't know," she murmured; "I'm afraid I love you too much to refuse. I'm too selfish. You are going to be a great man, Gerald. No, you mustn't interrupt me—that way; you are going to be a great man. I know it, and feel it. You should not marry

a little pauper like me to keep you back. I thought over it all last night, and I wanted to take your little ring from my finger, only I couldn't."

She kissed the little ring, and so led Gerald into temptation.

"Oh! you mustn't. I'm not sure yet that I'll marry you. You will be sorry afterwards."

"Sorry!"—that was all he could say, but he put a whole volume of meaning into the word. Dorothy was right. He could be very eloquent at times.

"Well, you might, you know, and then I would break my heart. I ought not to let you sacrifice yourself."

"But, my own darling, I'm as poor as yourself."

"Oh! but you might marry some rich girl—there, don't touch me. You wouldn't marry for money, that's just it. I'm sure you wouldn't want to marry me if I were rich."

"I'd marry you if you had a million," said Gerald, with fervour.

"Oh! I wish I had for your sake. I never thought much of it before. My father had heaps upon heaps of money. I sometimes thought he could make gold. I know he thought it himself. But it all vanished suddenly when——"

She checked herself suddenly and grew white at the remembrance of that awful day.

"My darling, you must not talk of that now. You must not think of it. It will be the one aim of my

life to make your life happy. We will be rich enough in our own love."

"Would you love me better if I were a great heiress?"

He did not answer in words, nor can words adequately convey the nature of his reply. Best leave lovers to themselves. Let the world laugh at their childishness—wisdom has no delight to rival their folly.

In a few minutes—as it seemed to them—there came another tap at the door, and Grace entering found them seated at the ends of the sofa.

She planted herself demurely between them, and forthwith the two girls fell a-chatting on every-day topics, while Gerald sat mum and glum in his corner, till Dorothy's hand went round her friend's waist and touched his, and the soft touch thrilled him with delight.

"Well, I'm off," he said abruptly, obedient to the message of her touch, and got himself awkwardly out of the room.

As the door closed behind him the two girls turned and looked each other smilingly in the face, and then by a mutual impulse they caught and kissed again and again.

"Oh! I knew he would," murmured Grace, while Dorothy sobbed with her head on her shoulder, and she played with the crisp, gold curls. "I knew he would all along, and I'm so glad, my dear, and I——"

This was the incoherent beginning of a conversation that lasted two good hours by the clock.

Meanwhile Gerald walked down to the House, enveloped in a rosy cloud, the kind of cloud that Virgil tells us Venus used to travel in; perhaps Venus lent it to him.

He was in time for prayers and passed into the House just before the Speaker. He did not notice the sensation his entrance caused and the general turning of eyes upon him as he passed. He had half forgotten the exciting incident of the previous night in the more delicious excitement of the morning.

The deep drone of the chaplain's voice had no meaning for him. Question time with its quick chatter of query and answer was mere incoherent sound.

A loud titter ran through the House and roused him at last.

Pert little Mr. Starling was on his feet, smiling self-complacently.

"Mr. Speaker, sir," he said, "I beg to ask the Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer question No. 7."

Gerald glanced down the order paper, which he had picked up from the basket half-mechanically as he came in, to find the question No. 7, and read—

"Mr. Starling. To ask the Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his attention has been

drawn to the claim of Mr. Cuthbert Pinto that he has discovered the philosopher's stone and is able thereby to multiply one sovereign by three, and if the Right Hon. gentleman will consider the advisability of availing himself of this discovery for the purpose of meeting the anticipated deficit in his Budget?"

Solemn and bland the Chancellor of the Exchequer rose, and his smile announced beforehand the sportive answer that turns on mirth.

"Pending the investigation at present in progress in the police courts," he said, "Her Majesty's Government did not purpose taking any steps in the direction indicated by the Honourable Member."

The question and answer captured Gerald's attention. The curious coincidence of the words that Dorothy had dropped that morning about her father roused his curiosity.

Amid the laughter that followed the reply of the Chancellor, he leant across the gangway to the Honourable George Towers.

"What's the meaning of this silly stuff of Starling's?" he asked.

"Glad to see you able to be down, old fellow," replied Towers. "Gad! that was the pluckiest performance I ever saw. All the fellows were talking about it. Oh! the question. Only a bit of tomfoolery of 'the Starling' about that fellow Pinto that is up at the police court, you know."

"What fellow Pinto?"

"Oh! you call yourself a journalist. Why all

London is jabbering about it. The fellow says he has got the philosopher's stone, that he can make three guineas out of one. Some kind of coiner, I expect. Anyhow the police have got him now. He is to be up again on remand to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXII

THE ALCHEMIST

"He turns a thousand thousand ounces
Of any imperfect metal into
Silver or gold in all examinations
As good as any of the natural mine."

BEN JONSON.

CURIOSITY carried Gerald to the police court next morning. He went down a long narrow street, and then down a long narrow passage, and found himself in the close, ill-ventilated court. The table in front of the bench on which the magistrate sat was like the counter of a chemist's shop. It was littered all over with test-tubes, bottles, and retorts.

"Hallo, Daly!" said a voice he knew, "what brings you here? What brings me, you are going to ask; business, my boy, business. I've got a brief for the prosecution. Well, as you are here, you are better sitting than standing. Come along, and I'll get a place for you. Make believe you are an invaluable witness."

Mr. Giltrap, Q.C., M.P., bustled through the crowd,

and turned out a *bonâ-fide* witness to make room for Gerald.

"His worship will give you a seat on the bench beside him," he said, "if you prefer it. You are a lion just now."

"Thanks, I'm not ambitious. I'll do splendidly here. Which is the prisoner?"

"In the dock there to the right."

Gerald glanced over his shoulder at the dark-faced, anxious-looking patentee and proprietor of the philosopher's stone.

The next moment a handsome, well-dressed man, the very embodiment of respectability, entered the witness-box. It was Mr. Augustus Ophir, the eminent jeweller of New Bond Street, and chief witness for the prosecution. He was duly sworn and examined by Mr. Giltrap. He gave his evidence in a curt, business-like fashion.

"The prisoner," he said, "called upon me and told me he had discovered the philosopher's stone; that he could turn one sovereign into three. I consented to witness his experiments. I went with Mr. Early to Fables' Hotel. The accused, with much mystery, introduced us into a private room, which was fitted up like a laboratory. He put a sovereign in a crucible, and added some black powder and some other ingredients—borax, as I thought then, and now know. He then set a light to some liquid, which caused a horrible stench. He put the crucible in a gas-furnace, and after it had been there about an

hour, took it out and broke it in our presence. It contained a nugget of gold about fifteen pennyweights—nearly three times the weight of a sovereign. I had it melted again and assayed, and it was returned as between twenty-one and twenty-two carat gold. Next day the prisoner called again upon me. He proposed that I should deposit forty thousand sovereigns in a tank."

"In a bank, you mean, Mr. Ophir?" from the Bench.

"No, your worship, not a bank—a tank, that was to be filled with an acid, whose composition was a secret. The money was to be left for eighteen days, and put then into a large furnace with certain powders and melted. It would produce, he said, gold worth more than £100,000. It would be necessary for this purpose to take an empty house in some quiet district. If any one came into the room during the progress of the operation he would be killed by the noxious vapour. They were so poisonous they would kill a horse. I did not exactly fall in with his proposal. I arranged for a second experiment to be conducted in my workshop. I had two officers from Bow Street to witness it, and the prisoner afterwards left in their charge."

"Were you deceived by the prisoner at all, Mr. Ophir?" asked Mr. Giltrap.

"No, not deceived, but amused and a little surprised that he should come to me of all people in the world. I knew from the first he was either a visionary

or a swindler—when he suggested the £40,000, of course I knew which."

"You see this bottle of black powder?"

"Certainly; it is the powder that was used by the prisoner. It was taken by the officers when they arrested him."

"Kindly let me see it," said the magistrate.

It was handed up to the Bench.

"It's very heavy," observed his worship. "Do you know what it is made of, Mr. Ophir?"

"Pure gold."

There was what the reporters call a "sensation" in court. That word gold sent a quiver of excitement through the crowd.

His worship smiled incredulously.

"You are not serious, Mr. Ophir?"

"Quite, your worship. You know the proverb, 'All is not gold that glitters.' We can match it with another, 'Gold does not always glitter.' There are five sovereigns hidden in that pinch of black powder."

Mr. Giltrap took the witness in hand again.

"You understood the prisoner's mysterious operation then, Mr. Ophir?"

"Oh yes, it was quite simple."

"Will you kindly explain it to the Court?"

"Well, you see, the prisoner first made gold into this black powder, and then made this black powder back into gold. That was all."

"Is the process a very difficult one?"

"Oh no! as I have said, quite simple. We use it every other day in our business."

"Perhaps it would be as well if you would kindly explain shortly how it is done."

"With pleasure. You melt a quantity of gold with double its weight of silver, with something less than half the bulk of borax. You then roll the melted nugget flat and cut it into small pieces—the smaller the better. Get the bits into a Florence flask, stick it in a saucepan half-full of sea-sand, then pour nitric acid in on the amalgam. It fizzes like soda-water awhile, and when it clears up there's the gold in this black powder at the bottom."

"And the silver, Mr. Ophir?"

"You drain off the acid to another vessel, throw in a handful of salt, and the silver is precipitated in pure white sand, ready for use again, if need be."

"How do you get back your gold again?"

"You have your gold all the time. There it is," and he shook the little bottle of black coal-dust.

"Get it back to the shape and colour of gold, I mean?"

"Oh! just melt it, as the prisoner did, with half its own bulk of borax, and it comes out yellow and solid again."

Gerald was at the court door quivering with excitement as the last answer was given. The subsequent proceedings interested him no more. He called a fast hansom and drove straight for Sunbury Crescent,

stopping only for one moment to buy a parcel of borax from a druggist on the way.

He found Martha letting out, or rather putting out, a young man of somewhat Jewish cast of countenance, that would have been handsome but that the black eyes were too closely set and the nose rose in too bold a curve.

"All right," the young man said to the uncompromising Martha, "tell your mistress I'll call to-morrow about two. Here's my card—'Mr. Isaacson.' I'm quite sure we will come to terms."

With a nod and smile Gerald was passing into the house, when Martha volunteered information.

"He wanted to buy up that rubbish in the cellar, sir."

Gerald stopped short. The words hit his thoughts.

"Wanted to buy what, Martha?" he asked abruptly.

"The rubbish in the cellar, sir. That young man, Mr. Isaacson. He knew all about it; said he read the inquest in the papers. He was very anxious altogether to carry it away at once. 'You must arrange with the mistress,' I said.

"'I wouldn't trouble your mistress about it at all,' he said. 'Rubbish like that is a servant's perquisite. We'll get it away without your mistress being a bit the wiser, and I'll make it well worth your while, old girl.' I don't think he liked the answer I gave him to that, sir, but he was as civil as pie all the time.

"'Well,' he said, 'I will settle it with your mistress to-morrow, if I must.' But he kept on waiting.

"'Might I take the full of this bag with me?' he asked, 'just as a sample.'

"'Not as much as would make a load for a midge,' said I.

"Then at last he took himself off—I half-suspected because he saw you coming, sir. Miss Dorothy would be delighted to let him cart away the stuff for nothing. Poor child! she hates the very thought of all belonging to the place. But if he is willing to pay for it, it would be a pity to baulk him."

"Yes, it's a pity to baulk him," said Gerald, with a grim smile, "but it's got to be done, I'm afraid. When your mistress comes in, Martha, will you say I would be glad to see her for a moment? It's important."

"Certainly, sir." "He looks pale and worrited," she added to herself as he went up the stairs three at a time. "Can't be they have had a tiff already."

"Come in," said Gerald half-an-hour later, pausing in an excited walk up and down the room; and Dorothy and his sister came in together. They had been shopping, and they carried some tiny brown-paper parcels, the *spola optima* of their expedition.

Grace kissed her brother, and there was congratulation as well as affection in the kiss.

Dorothy demurely gave him her hand.

"If that's the way," said Grace laughing, "I had better be off."

"Don't go, Grace," said Dorothy.

"Don't go, Grace," echoed Gerald.

Dorothy looked at him in quick surprise. It was all very well for Dorothy to say that, but for him it was startling. Then she noticed for the first time how pale and nervous he looked.

"You are not ill, Gerald?"

"Not in the least, darling, but I am excited about something—no, not bad news by any means. Do you mind answering a question or two, Dorothy? Has the cellar been disturbed since—I don't want to worry you, but it is really important."

"No one has put a foot in it since that awful time. Martha has the key. All his things are just as they were."

"And the great heap of coal-dust where—that you told me about?"

"It is still there. Oh! I see now. Martha has told you about the foolish young man wanting to buy it. He's coming to-morrow at two. This is his card. Will you manage it, Gerald, for me?"

"I'll manage it for you, but I don't think I would advise you to sell that—coal-dust to the foolish Mr. Isaacson just at present."

"But why, Gerald?—it cannot be of any value."

"I'm not quite sure of that, Dorothy; it may possibly be a rather valuable coal-dust. Of course I may be mistaken. But, if you don't mind, I'd like to test it before Mr. Isaacson carts it away. I know enough of chemistry to manage the testing, and the utensils are all there, you say."

"May Grace and I come?"

"Certainly. I want you to come and to see; I may want you to help."

"It will be such fun."

But she remembered when she had been last in the place, and her face grew pale and the smile died out of it.

"Cheer up," whispered Gerald, "the past is past. I'll try to make the future happy for you." He came closer to her as he spoke and——

Grace was looking out of the window.

The procession headed for the mysterious cellar, Gerald in front with light and key, the girls following with hands clasped tight and hearts beating—fearing they knew not what.

The iron door moving easily on smooth hinges admitted them, but the candle-light made but a small hole in the solid darkness. "I wonder if the electricity still works," said Gerald, and turned the little ivory knob near the door.

Old Jacob Merlyn's jobs were all well done. The electricity still worked. The strange room flashed at once into white light, dappled by black shadows.

The startled girls cried out together. Dorothy was trembling as old memories thronged upon her, and clung close to Grace, who gazed around in open-eyed amazement. Nothing was changed. The place might have been used the day before. The white tiles gave back the white light blindingly, the rusty cinders were in the furnace, and all round on floor and shelves were retorts and crucibles. Most conspicuous

of all was the great pile of brownish-black coal-dust, broken at the top and scattered at the sides over the white floor as on the day it had given up its ghastly secret.

Gerald saw Dorothy's eyes turned to the place with a horrible fascination. She was pale to the lips, and leant heavily on Grace. He found her a chair and set her facing the door, and Grace kneeling down beside comforted her.

Gerald himself, an eager purpose sustained. He fell to work at once, and after a little the girls half forgot their fear in the interest with which they watched him work.

He cleared the cinders from the furnace with his hands, found coke and firewood in their places, struck a match and kindled the dry wood, which caught flame at once. He pulled the string of the bellows violently, and it blew the flame out again. He was more patient the second time. He waited until the thick smoke rolled up from the coke and the red fire began to eat into the heart of the black mass. Working the bellows gently, he soon had the furnace a red glow, which after a bit settled to a pale pink with little vapoury blue flames hovering over it.

He found a clay crucible, three-cornered at the top like a cocked hat, and tapering to a round thick bottom. This he quarter-filled from the huge mound of black dust, threw in half the quantity of the borax he had brought with him, and with a long steel tongs set the crucible in the very heart of the fiery glow.

Curiosity had drawn the girls closer and closer to the furnace, till they sat with the hot glare upon their fair faces close beside Gerald, watching eagerly. Little sparks of fiery dust came and went on the surface of the crucible as it gradually turned from faint yellow to bright red, and from red to pure translucent white. The coarse black powder in the vessel began to shake and fall away as a lump of sugar falls away with moisture creeping through it. Softly yet swiftly before their eyes it dissolved to a lambent fluid, smooth and white and bright as quicksilver, permeated throughout with the glow of intense heat.

Then Gerald again dipped the long tongs into the heart of the furnace, drew the vessel out carefully, and set it on a stone slab beside a water tank.

Softly the white fluid in it changed from pure white to rich crimson. When the crimsoned darkened to ruddy brown, Gerald with a sharp blow broke the crucible in halves. A thick disc of red metal lay on the slab. He caught it in the tongs, plunged it into the water which hissed and smoked around it furiously, and drew it forth presently, still warm and smoking, but now of a dull yellow hue. Without a word he handed it to Dorothy.

It almost dropped from her hand.

"Oh, Gerald!" she cried, "it's so heavy. What is it? Do you know?"

"Pure gold," Gerald answered.

There was silence for a moment. Both girls seemed frightened by this sudden pronouncement.

At last Dorothy whispered, "And that great heap —is that all——?"

"Pure gold," said Gerald again.

"And all mine—all ours, I mean? Oh! Gerald, it's like a fairy tale. I'm so glad."

Gerald said nothing, but he did not look glad.

CHAPTER XXIII

MONEY THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

"A heart
Dearer than Pluto's mines, richer than gold."
SHAKESPEARE.

BOTH girls grew more and more delighted, with an innocent, restless, child-like delight, as the dazzling possibilities of this vast wealth dawned upon them. In their thoughts and talks bright schemes followed each other in bewildering procession.

"It was just living through the Arabian Nights," Dorothy said. "I no longer envy Aladdin his lamp."

But the gayer the girls grew, the glummer grew Gerald, till by slow degrees his gloom began to cloud their sunshine. A chill reaction had come to him at the very moment that his feverish hope was accomplished, and Dorothy proved the owner of almost limitless wealth. The keen instinct of the treasure-hunter that had excited and sustained him at first suspicion of the truth, died at the very moment of discovery. Yet it was his own work, he felt, and he must abide by it and carry it through to the end.

Next day he called at the Bank of England. His business was regarded as worthy the ear of the supreme financial pontiff of Mammon's temple—the Chairman himself. Without fuss or delay the gold was assayed and melted, and so found its way back in solid yellow bricks to the vaults of the Bank. Dorothy might now draw, as her father drew, a cheque on the Bank of England for a million, and have her draft honoured.

But this vast wealth seemed to Gerald like a wall of gold, shutting Dorothy out from his hopes. His pride fought with his love. His dearest dream had been by honest work to win wealth for her. Now the delight of giving—that most precious prerogative of love—was denied to him for ever. He had won her heart when she was poor—could he honestly claim it when she had grown unimaginably rich? Would she have loved him, he thought with ingenious self-torture, if she had known all from the first?

In spite of himself his manner took colour from his thoughts. He rather avoided than sought the chance of being alone with her. He grew cold and formal when they were alone, though she, guessing what was in his mind, met his coldness with soft words and sweet smiles, wooing him to woo.

Gradually the poor girl's girlish delight in her sudden wealth died away to mere apathy. She moped sadly, her eyes making piteous appeals to him to comfort her. He felt mean—horribly mean; but the black dog had got a grip of him, and he could

not shake himself free. What could he say, he asked himself constantly, what could he do? Perhaps it would be better they should part, though the very thought of it sent a cold shiver through him.

Then suddenly the crisis came. He had called for the girls in Dorothy's room, and just as he entered Grace slipped out quietly, leaving those two together.

Dorothy was sitting on the little sofa where he had first won her promise to be his wife. But he made no move now to take the place temptingly vacant by her side.

He stood awkward and silent in the centre of the room. She too sat quite still and silent for one long moment. Then all at once she leaped up and stood facing him; her hand clasped tight behind her back, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes flashing through the gathering tears.

He shrank from the anger in her face. "Let us have it out, once for all," she said, "and have done with it. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Gerald, aren't you heartily ashamed of yourself to drive me to this? Don't answer me, sir."—He had tried to speak, but was overborne by her quick rush of words. "I know well what is the matter with you, you don't love as well rich as poor. Oh! if you ever really loved me it would make no difference to you. You are sorry, you know you are, for our good fortune. Why did you bring it then? Why did you make me rich to make me miserable? Who asked you to

do it? Oh! Gerald, I wouldn't treat you like that. I'd love you just the same if you were rich as Crœsus. I was as poor as I could be when I promised you. I did not let my pride stand in the light of my love. But you! I could cry my heart out, but I'm too angry to cry."

The tears gathered in her eyes, but she brushed them away.

Gerald sat silent and shamed. He could find no word of excuse. With love's instinct she read the thoughts of his heart.

Suddenly her mood changed again. Her voice softened, she laid a little trembling hand on his shoulder, and searched his face with her eyes.

"I will forgive you," she whispered very softly. "I know you didn't really mean to hurt me. I know you love me, Gerald, and oh! how I love you."

Both hands were on his shoulders now. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened. With a sudden impulse leaning down she kissed him on the lips, then hid her burning face in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break.

What else was there to do but to take her fondly in his arms and kiss away her tears, and tell her over and over again with passionate reiteration how he loved her?

Under this judicious treatment Dorothy rapidly revived, smiling through her tears. She shyly coaxed him to talk of the new life that was opening out

before them. The good they could do, the good time they would have; they would go everywhere and see everything.

"We will buy back Loughile of course, Gerald," she whispered. "Grace told me about it long ago, and I have cried over the loss of it ever since—we—well, never mind since when. Won't you be glad to be there again with Grace, and won't your own people be glad to have you back again, and love me a little too for your sake? Then of course our wealth will help the good cause on which your heart is set and mine for your sake."

She forced him to share her hopes and her raptures, and made him heartily ashamed of the petty pride that had troubled him, casting its shadow not on his own love only, but on hers too.

When at last he begged forgiveness, she said, "I will pardon you just this once. But you must promise never again to be sorry we are rich, that you made us rich,—never forget that I and all I have are yours and yours only. When I gave you my love there was nothing else left for me to give. Now you must be off," she said at last, "for Grace and I are going shopping, and we will be late."

But on their return she confessed that all the pleasure was gone out of shopping, when you could buy what you liked without thinking of the price of it. "Poverty has its pleasures," she said, "and the best of them is a bargain."

But the joy of house-hunting was a compensation,

especially as the pursuit of such big game admitted male company. Many a pleasant expedition those three had together before they found at last the perfection of which they were in quest.

Grace had told Dorothy about their first miserable experiences in Dublin, and how Gerald had worked and suffered in those days. So the two girls made a hero of him and sang the praises of this glorious being in alternate strains, and laid loving plans for his pleasure in the good time to come.

You see they were not in the least "new women," those two. They were merely a couple of old-fashioned loving and lovable girls, sister and sweetheart. They had no high-souled aspirations for music-halls and latch-keys. They had never read any of the "Key" series, and wouldn't have enjoyed them if they did. They were silly enough to be very fond of Dickens and Thackeray. They rather liked the "monster man," and made much of him, and did not know in the least that they were themselves downtrodden slaves. All of which is of course a great pity, but it cannot be helped.

At last they found the very place they were in quest of, on the upper branches of the Thames, and fell simultaneously in love with it at first sight The situation was perfect, the house replete with old-fashioned beauty and new-fashioned comfort. Ripleton was indeed the prize place on the river. Woods, gardens, and pleasure grounds, and smooth green lawn, sloping down to the water, even to the orna-

mental boat-house and small fleet of pleasure-craft, everything was perfect about the place.

The owner had got a Colonial Governorship, and was about to carry himself and family to the other side of the globe. He wanted to sell the place inside and outside, just as it stood. Preliminaries are not troublesome when one has a million to credit at the Bank of England. In less than a fortnight Rippleton, and everything in and about it, was the property of Miss Dorothy Merlyn, "from the earth's centre to the sky," as the legal phrase goes.

The girls made this pleasant place their head-quarters, whence they sallied out on foraging expeditions through London.

Gerald went back to the little hotel in Craven Street. For five days of the week the House claimed him. But the five days' and nights' drudgery closed with a Saturday and Sunday of pure idleness and enjoyment, such delight as comes to no man more than once in a life-time, and to most men never.

It chanced one day that Dorothy and Grace had paused in the midst of a close game of lawn tennis, and Dorothy in the very act of intimidating the umpire, who lazed in an easy garden chair, with a cigar between his lips, when a slim pleasure-boat flashed suddenly into sight round a curve of the river. Almost at the same moment they all three recognized the man in white flannels, who made the little boat leap through the water with each long stroke, as George Towers, and the girl who reclined daintily on

the stern seat on a tiger-skin rug, tangling the rudder strings, as Jenny Bligh.

There was a general rush down to the boat-slip to meet them. George was all congratulations and Jenny all upbraidings.

"Was it right," she asked plaintively, "that the first news of all that had happened should come to her through a perfect stranger, like Mr. Towers?"

"Oh! I say," began Mr. Towers, but whatever he wanted to say was drowned in the full torrent of Jenny's reproaches.

Dorothy pacified her with tea and citron ices, and carried her off through the open French window of one of the sitting-rooms. Then having been solemnly pledged against paragraphs, she was initiated into the sacred mysteries of the trousseau and the trying on.

The deserted men sat smoking in silence, and gazing placidly over the sunshiny river. They felt very lazy and very happy.

"By the way, Daly," said Towers, "what have you done with that *protégé* of yours—what's his name, the chap you pulled out of the Thames, you know?"

"Oh! Clement Wilson is his name; he's nearly all right now. I see him every day almost. But he had a close squeak. It would seem that death was determined to keep him to his bargain."

"Yes, but what are you to do with him when he is well?"

"He wants to get out of this country, and I think

I know of an opening in the States into which we may squeeze him."

"Don't banish him just yet. You say he is a smart chap?"

"Clever and good-looking, and well-mannered and well-educated at the back of that. He speaks French, Italian, and German like three natives."

"The very thing. Lord Merrivale wants a chap to help him to run the new theatre he has just built. He'll take any one I tell him. It is hard on a clever fellow to have to chuck the old country. I think I can promise this job to your friend, if he cares for it."

"Thanks, old man," said Gerald, "it's just like you to think of it. I'm sure he will be delighted."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SUPERFLUOUS MAN

> "It is the little rift within the lute
> That by and by will make the music mute,
> And, ever widening, slowly silence all."
>
> TENNYSON.

GERALD lost no time in taking the good news to Clement Wilson. Having given this man his life he wanted to make the gift worth having. Visiting him almost every day with this feeling warm in his heart, his strong interest in him grew to something like friendship in the end. Clement Wilson came back by inches from the very brink of the grave. For days a mere vegetable life flickered in his frail body. He could neither move nor think. When at last the ebbing tide turned, and life began to flow back in on him again, Gerald was very proud of his handiwork. Here was, he thought, a man worth risking his own life to save. Wilson's face was delicately, even effeminately handsome, but his figure was as strong as a panther's. His manner was gentle and singularly insinuating. He made no profession of gratitude, but his gratitude showed itself delicately in every word he spoke, in

every tone of his softly modulated voice. Though he seemed to have been everywhere and seen everything, his talk was quite impersonal. Of his own past life he never spoke.

"Even to you," he said to Gerald, "my past must remain a secret, not for my own sake but for others who have claims on my silence."

He had expressed a strong desire to leave this country, and Gerald had been on the look-out for a chance for him when the Honourable George Towers' offer came as a pleasurable surprise.

Early on the following morning after his talk with Towers, Gerald called down to the hospital where Wilson still lived. Wilson greeted him cordially, delight and gratitude shining in his dark eyes.

"You look pleased," he said in a low voice, his gaze intent on Gerald's face.

"I am pleased for your sake."

"For my sake! That's like you. But I know of no good thing that has happened or is likely to happen to me."

"No, but I do," and he told him right away his talk with the Honourable George Towers. "The place would just about suit you," he wound up.

"Yes, the place would suit me, and I think I may say I would about suit the place. Curiously enough I have had some experience in that line. But——"

"But what?"

"I have no chance of it. There will be testimonials and recommendations required."

"There will be no trouble about that. George Towers will take my word, and Lord Merrivale will take his."

"Yes, but what can you say? What do you know? What can you tell about me except that I threw myself into the Thames and you pulled me out?"

"That's true. But surely there's somebody who—"

"Mr. Daly," the other broke in, "don't think me ungrateful. But, as I have already said, even to you I can tell nothing of my past life. There is no one to whom I could appeal for testimonials without danger of divulging secrets that are not mine. Such silence is, I know, suspicious, but I have no choice. Of all things in this world I would wish most to stand well with you. I dare not ask you to believe that in the secret of my life there is neither guilt nor dishonour. I have been impulsive, rash, reckless, it may be. But I have hurt only myself, and I have paid in misery for my follies."

Gerald found truth in his voice and eyes. He clasped his hand with warm sympathy.

"I honour you," he said, "for your honourable silence. It shan't hurt you if I can help it. I will only ask one promise, and that belongs not to the past but to the future. You will never again attempt your own life?"

"My life," said the other with all the semblance of deep feeling, "is yours for the future to do with as you will. I hold it in trust for you."

So they parted.

Gerald found his task much easier than he dared to hope. Towers brought Lord Merrivale to meet them at a little dinner at the House, and the matter was arranged right away. Clement Wilson captured the rich young nobleman, whose one object was to get his money's worth of enjoyment out of his life. "I want no other recommendation than the man's manner and appearance," he whispered aside to Towers, when they got down to the Terrace for a cigar. "I mayn't be over bright myself, but I know a bright chap when I meet him."

So the appointment was made that very night and confirmed the next morning. When Gerald met Lord Merrivale by accident a few days later, he was in greater raptures than ever with his new manager.

"I have to thank you, Mr. Daly," he said, "'pon my soul I have. You pulled a treasure out of the Thames for me. He is a wonderful fellow. Don't care much for work, your geniuses never do. But I don't mind that. I've got a type-writing, shorthand chap—a devil to grind—for that kind of thing. Can't spare Wilson for every-day drudgery. There's nothing he cannot do; he shoots and fences like that French chap, you know, in the novel, the Count of Monte Carlo, and boxes like Jem Corbet. He seems to have been everywhere and seen everything. There isn't a city in the New World or in the old he hasn't a good story out of. I've a good mind to chuck the

theatre and take a turn round the big ball with him. He is just the chap to show a fellow about."

Gerald parted from the exuberant young nobleman a little puzzled as to the honourable motives that kept Clement Wilson so very silent as to his adventurous past. But love is the greatest of all isolaters. He had no thoughts to spare from the girl who was for him the centre of the universe, with the sun, moon, and stars, and the broad earth and all the people on it, mere insignificant accessories. So Clement Wilson and all thoughts of him dropped out of his life for a time.

George Towers and Miss Bligh had been out all the Sunday afternoon on the shining river. They had found for themselves a secluded nook with big trees shading deep water—a perfect summer-house with transparent floor. There, while the boat swayed softly to the swing of the currents, Jenny would lecture on politics, philosophy, the rights of women, and the triumphs of journalism, while George would smoke and listen and look in placid enjoyment of the lecturer.

But this particular Sunday it was plain that something unusual had occurred. There was a double transformation when they returned. Jenny was very quiet, almost timid, with a pensive look in her eyes that Dorothy had never seen there before. Towers, on the other hand, was gay and restless.

Dorothy and Grace exchanged a single glance of

intelligence, they did not need to be told what the change meant.

"Well," said Towers, as he wiped his lips after a deep pull at a tankard of bitter beer, and began hunting up his cigar case, "what are we going to do to-morrow?"

"I don't know what's come to you to-day, Towers," said Gerald lazily, for the sun was bright and hot on land and water, "you're as restless and murmuring as the river. You have lost that divine repose which was your chief charm."

"Bother repose. I mean to treat myself to a good time. Let us go somewhere and do something."

"I'm held to the House," said Gerald.

"I'll pair with you."

"You cannot, old chap. You're paired already."

Jenny looked up with a quick blush.

"Oh! I don't mean that, Miss Bligh," said Gerald laughingly. "Towers' Parliamentary pair is a Liberal brewer, sixteen stone, and sixty years. But I must be in the House."

"One off," said the irresponsible Mr. Towers. "We must try to console each other in your absence, old fellow."

"I'm going home," said Jenny softly, and his high spirits dropped and froze like the mercury in a hard frost.

"I'll go with you, Jenny," said Dorothy; "I've a lot of things to do in town. We'll lunch together at the Victoria."

"The Victoria is near St. James' Park, and St. James' Park is near St. Stephens, and things that are near to the same thing are near to one another," said Jenny, with a flash of her old sauciness, and Gerald looked a swift entreaty, and Dorothy smiled a bright assent, and so the assignation was made that was to change the current of their lives.

They had been walking nearly an hour next day in the Green Park with every sense steeped in delight. The soft wind, the sparkling water, the sunshine and the shade through which they paced demurely were vague, but pleasant accessories to the rapture of young love.

Then an incident chanced which brought them down to earth with a sudden shock, and kept them there.

For the third time they passed a seat set well back from the pathway and deep in the shade, when Gerald's eye apprised him of a face he knew, and he woke up to the fact that Clement Wilson was lounging there with a smile of quiet amusement on his lips, which died out demurely as he caught Gerald's eye and raised his hat.

He looked handsomer than ever and perfectly dressed.

"Delighted to see you, Wilson," said Gerald as the other moved towards them, yet not without a quick glance down the long walk as though he were expecting some one. "Should have looked you up, but I saw Lord Merrivale the other day. You have completely taken him by storm."

Wilson laughed a low musical laugh. "Merrivale is a right good fellow," he said heartily, but there was the very faintest touch of contempt in his tone.

The two men were standing close together, Dorothy hung back a little. Gerald hesitated for a moment, he could not have told why. "Wilson," he said, "let me introduce you to my intended wife, Miss Merlyn."

Wilson had turned courteous and smiling towards Dorothy, when Gerald began, looking her for the first time in the face. But the smile died off his lips and the light out of his eyes as her name was spoken. His face grew ghastly, and he gave a little stifled cry, like a man shot through the heart and about to fall.

Dorothy had put out her hand to him, but he made no motion to take it, but stood there stock still with staring eyes that searched her face.

It was only for a moment. The strong will of the man, overthrown as it seemed by some sudden shock, resumed its sway. But as his hand touched hers, Dorothy felt, even through her glove, that it was icy cold, and the deadly pallor was still in his face, though lips and eyes were smiling.

"A heart spasm," he said easily, answering her look of pity. "It comes and goes like a flash. It is not dangerous, the doctor says, but it is ugly to look at, I'm afraid. I trust I have not frightened you, Miss Merlyn."

"I'm afraid you are still in pain. You look pale."

"Oh! that will pass off in a moment." He started as he spoke, and Dorothy following the quick look

of his eyes, caught a glimpse of a girl coming towards them,—a slight graceful figure, with gay parasol thrown negligently over her shoulder, and with the sunshine gleaming on her golden hair. She walked with a quick, light step until she was quite close to the group, then she went by them slowly and turned to Dorothy as she passed a pretty piquant face, with full red lips through which a white line of teeth showed, and large grey eyes with the glint of polished steel.

When she had gone by a hundred yards or so, she turned without any disguise and passed them again, glancing sharply from Dorothy to Wilson, who raised his hat slightly as she passed.

Gerald saw her then for the first time. He had been urging Wilson to let them take him to his hotel, but he stopped abruptly.

The woman was indeed faultless in the quiet elegance of figure and dress. But there was something—he could not tell what—that made him feel ashamed that Dorothy should so much as look at her.

"Well, take care of yourself, old fellow," he said a little hastily to Wilson as he turned away.

Wilson smiled and raised his hat, and quickly overtaking the girl, who waited for him at a little distance, walked away with her apparently in animated conversation.

Gerald found Dorothy's arm trembling in his own.

"I'm frightened of your friend," she said. "I

wanted to like him for your sake, Gerald, but I never can. I'm half sorry you saved him."

"Oh! He's a decent fellow enough," said Gerald, a little surprised at this sudden outburst. "But there's no need to talk or think of him, my pet, now, at any rate."

"Now, or any other time," she answered.

How little she knew!

CHAPTER XXV

A SHADOW AND A CHILL

"The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That, rotting inward, slowly moulders all."

TENNYSON.

THE incident, slight as it seemed, had jarred strangely on Dorothy. A chord was struck in her heart whose vibrations she could not still. She felt there was some strange bond of sympathy or antipathy—which, she could not say—between this man's life and her own. Women are more subject (if we may use the phrase) than men to the infection of presentiment; their souls are more sensitive to the shadow of coming misfortune.

In vain Gerald tried to find a way back again to that pleasant paradise, where lovers dwell alone and no disturbing thought can enter.

The cloud of some vague fear was upon Dorothy; there was a wistful tone in her voice that went straight to his heart, and more than once the blue eyes were dimmed suddenly by idle tears.

For a time he tried his best to cheer her, but ended

by sharing her vague despondence. When she said 'good-night' in the hall at Rippleton, it almost sounded like 'good-bye.'

All the way back to London and all through the lonely night, Gerald was troubled by some haunting fear, impalpable as a ghost, that set sober reason at defiance. It did not vanish as such things do in the freshness of the morning. He felt that Dorothy's presence, to see and hear and feel her all his own, was the one hope to lay the evil spirit that troubled him.

Before twelve o'clock he found himself walking up the lawn at Rippleton, but early as it was there had been a visitor before him.

As he stood on the broad stone steps with an impatient finger on the button of the electric bell, the door opened suddenly, and a man's face showed within a foot of his own: a handsome face, all aglow with some mocking triumph that smiled on the red lips and blazed in the dark eyes.

It was only for a second. As Clement Wilson met Gerald's look of astonishment, his face changed so rapidly, one could hardly believe there was a change.

The customary look of affection and gratitude, touched with subdued melancholy, was there again as he grasped Gerald's hand in cordial greeting.

"You here!" was all that Gerald could stammer out in his surprise.

"I have found that Miss Merlyn and I are very old friends," the other replied very softly, "so I

ventured to call and renew our friendship. Have you known her long, Mr. Daly?"

"Long enough to love her with all my heart," said Gerald impetuously. "But where and how and when did you meet her?"

The other's face took a look of gentle deprecation.

"You will forgive me," he said. "I know you will forgive me. It is the deepest pain I am forced to have a secret from the man who saved my life at the risk of his own. But the secret is not mine. I have told you there are incidents of my past life which honour forbids me to hint even to you. Miss Merlyn may speak if she chooses, but my lips are sealed."

Then with a pleasant smile and nod, he went jauntily down the steps and across the lawn.

"Is your mistress in?" Gerald asked of the pleasant-faced girl that opened the door to him; footmen were tabooed at Rippleton.

"Yes, sir," the girl answered hesitatingly, "but——"

"Where is she?" he asked, cutting her short impatiently, and the girl pointed to the drawing-room door that opened off the hall.

Gerald turned the handle and entered quickly, but stopped short at the threshold like one shot.

Dorothy sat in an easy chair facing him, her eyes wide open, seeing nothing. Her face was grey rather than pale. There was no thought or feeling in it. It seemed as if the soul had been stunned, as the body is sometimes stunned, by a sudden shock.

There forced itself upon Gerald a curious feeling

that he had expected to find her so. The vague forboding that had troubled him through the long night was horribly realized.

He stepped towards her quickly, calling her name. She wakened as from a trance at the sound of his voice, and the dull torpor of her face changed in a moment to live pain.

But when she saw the yearning love and longing in his eyes, her soul was satisfied. As she rose from her chair he caught her in his arms and kissed her. His touch seemed to melt the sorrow that froze her heart, and with a sudden rush of tears relief came.

"My own sweetheart," he murmured, "my own poor pet, it is terrible to find you like this. What has come to you, Dorothy, you that are always so bright and brave? You must have no grief or pain that I may not share."

She only clung the closer to him and sobbed in his arms like a child.

"Won't you tell me what troubles you, Dorothy?"

"If I only dared," she whispered. "But I have promised so solemnly. I had to promise. I'm wicked to grieve so; I ought to be glad perhaps at what has happened—what I have heard. But it is so sudden and to me so terrible. I'm frightened, Gerald, and I don't know what to do, and I dare go to no one—not even to you—for advice."

"I can comfort you, my darling. I can share your sorrow if I may not share your secret. Even through the darkness I can stretch a hand to help you."

"And you will love me always, whatever happens?"

"Always—can you doubt me?"

"I would as soon doubt God almost."

After that they spoke no more of the grim secret. Their thoughts and words seemed to flow once more in the bright stream of love, with sunshine on its waves. But there was a difference—each felt there was a difference, though each strove to hide it from the other. The ghost of that grim secret was between them, and struck a chill to their hearts which love's endearments could not warm. In their rapture there was a feverish restlessness where before there had been blissful repose.

They parted at last with a brave attempt at cheeriness, and Dorothy stood smiling at the door till he was out of sight, and Gerald hummed a gay love-tune till he was out of hearing. But Dorothy fled from the door to her room to cry her eyes red and her cheeks pale, and Gerald wore a face so woe-begone that the first man he met on entering the House cried—

"Hallo! Daly, what has come to you? No bad news, I hope?" and he had to pull himself together with an effort to answer "no."

Verily a great trouble plays with its victim as a cat with a bird. There is the first sudden shock, the sense of capture, of pain and peril. Then for a moment there is release, but the wings are hurt and the heart enfeebled by the shock; the victim can

but flutter, not fly; the cruel terror still overhangs its life, vigilant, treacherous, ready for a spring.

So it fared with Gerald and with Dorothy, while they strove to ignore the secret trouble that was rarely absent from their thoughts, and snatched at times a brief feverish relief.

For a week that trouble took no tangible shape. They were alone together, pacing slowly the broad walk of Rippleton garden, where the fruit gleamed rosy or golden in the rich autumnal sunshine, when that overshadowing fear struck again.

The cloud had lightened a little from their hearts. Gerald was urging a speedy marriage. He had grown more impatient of late, and Dorothy with rosy hesitancy had shyly yielded to his prayer.

"In a fortnight, my darling," he entreated—and she shook her head with a gently whispered "no" which was assent.

Then they talked softly, almost timidly, of their future life and hopes and happiness, when the thrilling mystery of their union should be accomplished. Now and again a word fell that set Dorothy's virgin cheek on flame, and thrilled her heart with an emotion tender and vague as the flowers longing for the sunshine. That first instinct in every true woman's soul stirred in her; that instinct, that warms the heart of the two-year-old toddler as she softly croons her dolly to sleep, and of the crone of fourscore as she hugs her blooming grandchild to her withered bosom, from which all other feelings but that one

immortal passion of maternal love, have long since faded.

There was a flutter of skirts and a gleam of colour on the steps that led to the garden, and one of the maids came tripping down the broad walk. Surely sorrow never chose a gayer messenger.

"A gentleman for you, miss. Oh, I told him you were engaged particular"—this with a sly glance at Gerald,—"but he said as he knowed you would see him for a moment."

The colour fled from Dorothy's cheek, and the frightened look returned to her eyes as she picked up the card from the salver and read "Mr. Clement Wilson."

"I will see him, Kate," she said nervously, with her eyes on the ground.

Then with a quick appealing look to her lover as the girl left them—"You don't mind my seeing him, Gerald?"

There was a petulant answer on Gerald's lips, but he turned it to a laugh that rang a little hollow.

"Of course not, darling, if you really wish it. I told you he was a decent fellow. I always liked him, though you didn't take to him at first. I know him longer and better than you."

"Longer and better than me! I wonder if you really knew——"

She stopped in the middle of the sentence, and Gerald, following her frightened glance, saw Clement Wilson coming towards her with out-stretched hands.

As his fingers touched Dorothy's in greeting, Gerald knew it was false to say he liked the man. Hate he felt would be nearer the mark. Wilson was handsome, wonderfully graceful. His manner was the very perfection of suave courtesy, and Gerald hated him for it all as one hates a beautiful, treacherous wild beast instinctively. Wilson greeted his rescuer most cordially, yet at the moment Gerald knew he hated him. But there was a faint uneasy hint of surprise in his voice at seeing him there. There was a lurking triumph in his eyes and a lurking sneer on his lips, when he was most cordial.

But it was his manner to Dorothy that angered Gerald most. It was respectful—one might say appealing. Not a word or gesture or tone or half-tone in his voice gave tangible ground for complaint. Yet there was an intangible suggestion of proprietorship in his manner, a hint of a secret bond between them, against which she chafed even while she submitted.

Wilson talked lightly and easily of a thousand topics of fashionable London. But he dropped no word of any special object in his inopportune appearance. He made himself—as the phrase goes—perfectly at home. He was entirely at his ease with the young lovers. More than once he touched upon their engagement with a half jesting familiarity that stung Dorothy to the quick and heated Gerald's blood to boiling point. Half-a-dozen times he would have flared out in fierce anger at the subtle insolence

of the other's tone, but Dorothy's pleading look quieted him. The time dragged wearily, but still Wilson showed no sign of going.

Gradually Gerald grew conscious that these two had between them some secret of which they would not or could not speak when he was there; that both wished him gone. Hurt to the soul he yet accepted his fate with a cheerful look.

"Good-bye, Dorothy," he said, and as he pressed her hand tenderly he caught the half-amused smile of Wilson, for which he could have struck him on the lips.

Before the door closed he heard him say to Dorothy in quite a changed voice, "May I stay to dinner? I have something very special to say to you," and Dorothy answered nervously, "Of course if you wish it."

CHAPTER XXVI

DRIFTING APART

"Nor of his deep devotion stinted aught,
But kept the faithful orbit of his love,
Although he darkly felt another pass
Between him and the planet that he loved,
And shut its light and beauty out from him."

GERALD'S heart was hot within as he walked away rapidly by the river from which his own hand had plucked this man to blacken his life. He had told himself he would respect Dorothy's secret, even in his thoughts. But no man is master of his thoughts. A thousand wild surmises, all fraught with pain, chased each other through his throbbing brain. What was the galling secret that bound this fresh and pure young girl to this brilliant adventurer, whom undeserved fortune had saved from self-inflicted death? He could find no answer that had even the semblance of truth. But the perplexing problem kept dinning at his brain with intolerable monotony. It was a thorn festering in his flesh more painful than a dangerous wound. Something of that self-torturing

feeling that makes us press the part that pains carried him early next day to Rippleton.

He was received with almost feverish delight. There was an humble appeal for forgiveness, a timid, wistful affection in every glance of her eyes, every tone of her voice, that pained even while it charmed him. It was all the more intolerable that any shadow should fall on love like this.

For a fortnight he suffered this fever of anxiety, with its hot fits of anger and its cold fits of doubt and pain; then at last the crisis of the disease came.

He was to dine with Dorothy, and had escaped the House and got out to Rippleton an hour before he expected. Just as the door opened to his ring he caught sight of the flutter of her dress, down a long dim walk which was a favourite resort of theirs. He started impetuously in pursuit with quick, light steps, meaning to steal up behind and surprise her. The walk was roofed with trees; only here and there the autumn sunshine trickled in little drops of gold through the close shade. It was twilight there even at noon. He had gone a couple of hundred yards before he saw, with a shiver of surprise, that Dorothy was not alone. There was no mistaking the graceful easy figure of the man that lounged beside her, stooping towards her as they walked, and talking very earnestly.

While Gerald stood stock still in utter bewilderment, Dorothy and Clement Wilson reached the little rustic stile that closed the walk.

Then familiarly—and as it seemed a thing of custom—Wilson stooped down and kissed her forehead.

The hot blood surged to Gerald's face. The trees and ground seemed to swim before his eyes. For one moment's space he leant his hand against a projecting branch to steady himself. Then he turned on his heel, and with a face set and white, as a man's who has seen a ghost, fled from the place.

A moment afterwards Dorothy came fluttering back along the shady walk, her fair face full of bright expectancy.

"Mr. Daly not come yet?" she said to the maid who opened the door.

"Oh! yes, miss. A good few minutes ago."

With welcome shining in her eyes, Dorothy caught the handle of the drawing-room door.

"Lor! miss, he is not in there. Just as I opened the hall door for him I seed him go down the steps three at a time. I thought to myself he must have seed you somewhere on the ground."

There was a twinkle in the girl's eye, though she spoke demurely.

But Dorothy no longer saw or heard her. With a sudden sickening feeling she knew where Gerald went; what Gerald saw. The physical instinct that makes all wounded things fly and hide was strong upon her. She turned away her face that the maid might not see how pale she had grown of a sudden. She caught the broad balustrade that she might not falter or fall. The bird flies high, the deer runs

strong, that a fatal aim has hurt to death. She went firmly up the stairs, and she locked the door of her room carefully before she flung herself on her bed in bitter tearless agony, with despair and shame tearing at her heartstrings.

The same instinct carried Gerald straight home. He got there unconsciously as a drunken man, seeing nothing, hearing nothing by the way, carried forward through the thronged streets by some half-mechanical impulse that guides and saves.

His mind was in a whirl. His brain kept still beating on the one thought with maddening monotony. How could what he had seen accord with faith in his sweetheart's love and truth, to which he desperately clung as the one thing to save him from the dark waters of despair that were closing round his soul? His was that bright sunny temperament over which light troubles pass lightly, but which great griefs stun. He could not act, he could not think; he could only suffer. The dull pain of loss numbed soul and sense. He could scarcely realize his sorrow, far less fight against it.

An hour passed, and he lay still huddled in the chair into which he had flung himself, when a light tap came to the door and a soft voice said—

"I'm so glad to find you in, Gerald. I'm just off to Rippleton—have you any message for——"

He raised his face from his hands at the sound of his sister's voice.

With a little, quick, inarticulate cry that was of no

language but love's, she was across the room and on her knees beside him, caressing his hand that hung limp over the chair.

"Oh! Gerald," she cried, "what has come to you? I knew you were in trouble for weeks, but I kept quiet, hoping it would blow over. But this is terrible. Don't give way like that, Gerald, or you will break my heart. Cheer up and bear your sorrow like a man." She meant like a woman. "Oh! if I could only help or comfort you. Remember, my dear, whatever happens you have always my fond, fond love. There was a time, Gerald, when my love was enough for you. But I gave you up without grudging, thinking she could make you happier than I could. But now—there, I won't say a word against her, if you will only cheer up and be like yourself again."

Her gentle touch and loving voice soothed him, and roused his latent manhood. She talked softly of the old times, their happiness and their struggles, till they were boy and girl again. But all the time her heart was hot with smouldering anger against that other woman who had stolen his love and used it to torture him. Even while they talked together softly in the gathering twilight, she resolved the first chance she got to "have it out" with Dorothy.

Meanwhile, Dorothy was an object rather of pity than of anger. If she hurt she suffered. Nor was she even allowed the poor privilege of suffering in silence and alone.

Gerald was not gone twenty minutes when Jenny Bligh arrived, and with her George Towers, glorying in his now acknowledged proprietorship.

There can be no doubt, we think, in spite of the children's histories of Greece, that the famous Spartan boy—was a girl. A boy might have hung on to the biting fox, but he would have kicked and howled and tried to choke the life out of it. It is only a girl that can smile while the sharp fangs are tearing her heartstrings.

In five minutes Dorothy came down to Jenny and George in the drawing-room, with a pleasant every-day face of smiling welcome. They talked for a few minutes on every-day topics. She did not notice that her visitors were as abstracted as herself. She was only longing all the time for them to leave her. If Jenny were alone she would have told her she was in trouble, for her heart was aching for sympathy, and she would have loved to have been pitied and kissed and cried over. But with George there, she hid the gnawing fox with easy grace, and chatted about the weather.

Jenny was graver than usual. Plainly she had something on her mind. Now and again she glanced sharply at George, who avoided her glance as a school-boy shirks the eye of the master when there is a task to be done.

Suddenly in the midst of an awkward pause Jenny began as formally as a chairman opening proceedings—

"Dorothy, we are come to have a serious talk with you."

"You are very kind, I'm sure," said Dorothy, hardly knowing what she said. At another time she would have been amused at Jenny's pomposity, but she was past amusement now.

Jenny went on more rapidly now that the ice was broken and the first cold plunge taken, but still in a flutter of confusion.

"I think, Dorothy, or rather George thinks—that is, he didn't think at first, but he does now—that there are certain things which he knows which you have a right to know, and which he—as a friend of yours and of Mr. Daly's—is bound in honour—yes, bound in honour, George—to disclose. He feels it his duty to prevent you being imposed upon, and no silly foolish scruples, for that's what they are,"—this with another sharp glance at Towers—"ought to prevent him doing what he knows is right."

Jenny had planted herself in a big arm-chair that swallowed up herself and the flowers of her dark-green tabinet dress. She was fond of dressing her dainty little figure in rich heavy stuffs that made her look like a big doll. But now there was the eager look of a true-hearted woman in that piquant little face. She plainly was very much in earnest, and Towers—the most placid of men as a rule—was painfully nervous. He shuffled with his feet and fiddled with his hat when Jenny had done speaking.

There was solemn silence again in the room.

Dorothy listened, vaguely wondering what was to come next, and hoping it would be soon over.

"Miss Merlyn," Towers began awkwardly, "it's this way, you see. Jenny thinks——"

"And you think," broke in Jenny impetuously.

"——that I am bound in honour to speak to you about Wilson, the man that comes here so often."

A throb of impatient pain and anger stung Dorothy at the name. Why should those two come with their silly tattle to probe the secret wound in her heart?

"Well?" she said, with a suppressed anger in her voice which did not escape the other girl's quick ear. "Say what you have come to say, Mr. Towers."

"The truth is," said Towers, "I feel as mean as a pickpocket; you needn't frown, Jenny—I do. But I suppose it's all right. I know you, Miss Merlyn, and I know Daly, and I am bound to do the straight thing by him of course. Daly saved Wilson's life and all that. I was there that night, Miss Merlyn. It was the pluckiest thing I ever saw done. The Terrace was crowded, and when he went up the side of the barge we gave him a cheer that old Grandison might have been proud of."

The honest fellow had come on a pleasant topic. It was like a horse that gets on the margin of green turf at the hard road's edge, and breaks into a canter at once. But Jenny, with a sudden wrench of the bit, brought him back again to the hard track.

"About Mr. Wilson, George," she said.

"Of course. Well, you see, Miss Merlyn, you would naturally have a fancy for the fellow Wilson. I mean, of course, because Daly saved his life. So you might like to have him here and be civil to him. But he is not your sort, believe me. Daly wouldn't know as much as I do. He doesn't knock about town. A man might commit murder and Daly would not hear of it. But I have been all round the place in my day. There's one club I used to go to a good deal, and I turn in now and again even yet. It's what you might call a fast club, but it's straight. They play high there, but they play fair. Well, Merrivale brought Wilson there, and he took to plunging with the best of them. On the third night he was caught cheating, with an extra ace between his knees, and turned out of the place. Merrivale has got rid of him, of course, after that. But still he seems to have lots of money, and spends it badly."

Dorothy opened her mouth as if to speak, but said nothing.

"But even that's not the worst, Miss Merlyn," Towers stammered out, with something like a blush on his tanned face. "There are other things I cannot even hint to you. I wish you'd take my word for it that he is a real bad lot. I wanted to tell all this to Daly instead of you, but Jenny said no. Daly would very likely pitch him back again in the river if he found him here, and there would be no end of a row. But you can quietly drop him, you see, and that will be the end of it. I had no fancy for the job, Miss

Merlyn, I can tell you. I'd sooner horsewhip the fellow up and down the Strand, if that would do any good."

"Is that all?" said Dorothy quietly.

"All! and quite enough too, I should say," exclaimed Jenny. "You should thank George for telling you the truth, Dorothy."

"I don't thank him for telling me—the truth. I wish he would not come here with his stories; I wish you would not bring him here. It's not fair to me, it's not kind of you, Jenny. It's not manly, Mr. Towers, to come worrying a miserable girl, even if all you say is true. What can I do?"

There was a little angry emphasis on the "if," that made poor Towers wince as if he were stung, and roused Jenny to sudden fury.

"How dare you, Dorothy?" she cried, "how dare you accuse George of lying? He did this for your sake and Mr. Daly's, and you saw—you could not help seeing—how he hated to do it. That's his thanks. What can you do, indeed! You can get rid of your disreputable pet that keeps coming here every other day. Unless, indeed, you have some special reason for——"

There was no knowing what she would have said next. But Towers laid his great hand softly on her shoulder.

"Hold hard, Jenny," he said; "you'll be sorry afterwards. Miss Merlyn never meant to doubt my word, I'm sure. Something has worried her, and she

just hit out without thinking. But old friends like you two mustn't fall out about trifles."

Poor Dorothy felt horribly miserable and ashamed of herself. She had hurt this simple, honest fellow, whose only thought was to help her. If a man had said what she had said to Towers, she knew the answer would be a blow. Her generous heart prompted her to quick atonement.

"Indeed, indeed, I never doubted your word, Mr. Towers, and I saw how it pained you to have to tell me what you've told. I have been horribly ungrateful to you, but you will forgive me, for I'm very miserable. I believe every word you told me. I half suspected it myself. But I can do nothing, nothing but what I am doing. My God! it is very hard on me."

Then with quick feminine inconsistency she turned sharply on Jenny.

"I didn't expect of you, Jenny, to come and worry and scold when you knew I was in such sore trouble. I would not do it if you were suffering. I thought I had a friend in you whatever happened."

Towers was amazed at this sudden attack, but it cooled Jenny's anger in a moment. She noticed for the first time Dorothy's pale face and the tell-tale traces of tears in her eyes, and she caught her in her arms in a quaint motherly way as if she were a sick child.

"My own pet," she said, "you know I didn't mean to worry you. You shall do and say just what you

like, and I'll never say a word again. Go away, George. Why do you stand there staring? Don't you see she is not well?"

So Towers, amazed at this sudden desertion of his ally, was driven from the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

THAT FATAL WORD—FAREWELL

"That would against thine own eye-witness, fain
Have all men true and leal, all women pure."
TENNYSON.

GRACE made up her mind. Gerald, she was sure, was merely worrying himself for nothing. Men were foolish when they were in love. A quiet word to Dorothy would put everything to rights again. Dorothy, she was sure, had no notion how Gerald felt about Wilson. She need only get the slightest hint, and that man would be sent packing. So Grace was at Rippleton early the next morning on her peace-making mission. The place seemed the very home of peace. The air breathed so soft from the moving river, the bees buzzed so dreamily in the ripe roses, drinking in sunshine and honey, that care, or trouble, or sorrow, seemed there quite out of place. So Grace was full of hope as she sat waiting at the open window of the sitting-room, where the air was perfume, and looked out on the shining river. But at the first look at Dorothy's face, when she came into

the room, the hope began to waver and die. All knowledge came to Grace through her eyes, so she had grown an accomplished thought-reader. In Dorothy's face she saw some hidden sorrow, some torturing mystery, that frightened her.

With a wistful smile, and a palpable attempt at gaiety, Dorothy made her friend welcome.

"This is good of you. I was feeling so lonely, Grace. You will stay for lunch, of course?"

"Lunch, dinner, and bed, my dear, if you please. I'm come for a long day, and a good talk with you."

This was as near as Grace dare go to her mission, which seemed such a simple thing when she started.

After lunch, the two girls strolled out, linked arm and arm, on the sunshiny lawn. Gradually the little flow of small talk ran dry. They walked on in solemn silence, close down to the river's brim, on which a pretty rustic summer-house, smothered in creeper, was set.

Grace strove in vain to find words to fit the thought that lay so heavy at her heart, and Dorothy only too surely guessed what was coming, with the chilling feeling that this was the last day they should spend together—the end of their friendship.

Yet it was Dorothy that spoke out at last; not Grace.

They were seated in the summer-house, whose open door looked across the river at the wooded banks beyond, framing the bright landscape in a frame of clustering leaves and flowers.

The soft monotonous sigh and sob of the stream as it went by jarred on Dorothy's nerves, as smooth sounds will at times, till they grow unbearable. She broke out suddenly.

"I am very, very miserable, Grace."

It was quietly said, but Grace's eye saw the quivering of her lips, and knew that the words were a groan.

All thought of the lecture she had planned vanished in a moment.

She patted Dorothy's hand tenderly, and met her appealing look with eyes full of love and sympathy.

"I can see it in your face, dear," she said. "You are fretting your heart out over something. Tell me what troubles you. Let me help and comfort you."

"I cannot, I cannot," wailed Dorothy. "The secret is not mine. Oh! Grace, I feel my love and my life slipping away from me. I cannot help myself—no one can help me."

"It is that wretch, Wilson," said Grace, vehemently, "I know and feel it. I knew from the first his coming was a curse. Sometimes, I think, Dorothy, that we, to whom God has made the wide world a great silence, for whom music has no meaning, to whom the words of our friends are but motions of the lips, are gifted with a strange instinct all our own. I seem to see into that man's heart. I read it in the light in his eyes—in the smile on his lips. I know him—cunning, false, and cruel. My very soul recoils from him. His presence is contamination. I don't ask

you for your secret, Dorothy, but I do implore you to put this man out of your life. I might ask you for Gerald's sake, but I will rather entreat you for my own. I have loved you as a sister, Dorothy, almost from the first. I trust you will be soon my sister indeed. I gave up to you ungrudgingly the first place in his heart. I never asked you for anything before. You won't refuse me now?"

But Dorothy only turned away her face and sobbed out again, "I cannot! I cannot! Don't try me too hard, Grace; I cannot do what you ask me."

"For *his* sake, then, if not for mine. I don't know your motive. I don't want to know. For this vile man's pleasure will you break Gerald's heart? You must have pity on him, if you have none for yourself. I don't like to tell you, I didn't mean to tell you how Gerald suffers. You have no right, Dorothy, to play fast and loose with his love and happiness."

"Don't! Grace, don't! You torture me, and all to no purpose. You can say nothing I have not told myself again and again. But I have no choice, believe me, I have no choice."

"You may have to make choice between him and Gerald, Dorothy," said Grace hastily. "It may come to that."

"It has come to that," Dorothy replied sadly. "The choice is made. My love is lost to me. Your brother knows this, Grace. He has put me from him in his heart. He believes me false. He has good reason to believe it, and—God help me—I can say

no word to clear myself. I know well what I am losing, but the choice is made. I have no power to change it."

"You don't mean it, Dorothy?" cried Grace amazedly. "You cannot mean it. To give up Gerald for that man! You could not be so cruel. What terrible infatuation blinds you even to think of such a thing? No one can tell you, as I can, what you are throwing away."

"You can tell me nothing of him I do not know. The happiness of my life is ended. I wish to God my life was ended too. But I must go on."

"Why? why? why?"

"I cannot tell you. Oh! Grace, don't leave me like that. I'm very, very miserable. Indeed, indeed it's not my fault. Won't you even say good-bye?"

But Grace thought of her brother, and anger killed her pity. She put aside the clasp of restraining arms, and turned coldly away. She could not hear the pitiful cry of pain, as she left. But she had not gone five yards when she turned to find those wistful blue eyes fixed on her with humble entreaty. Dorothy was standing, her slim figure outlined against the dark background of the summer-house. Her face was dead white, and she swayed for a moment as if about to fall. In an instant Grace sprang back and clasped her in her arms. The touch seemed to give Dorothy strength. She kissed Grace vehemently on lips and cheeks and forehead with a passion

of affection. Then suddenly she broke from her friend's embrace, and fled like a shadow across the lawn to the house, feeling that if she paused for a moment she must fall.

Very sore at heart, Grace got back to town. She was glad that Gerald had gone down to the House for the day and night, for she feared to tell him the bad news. But the respite was a brief one. Amid the pile of letters and circulars on his table next morning was a little note that made his heart cold with fear. He held it for a moment or two in his hand, looking vacantly at the direction. Then suddenly, as a man nerves himself to face pain or danger, tore it open. It was very short.

"My dearest Gerald,—Let me say Gerald this once. You have a right to ask an explanation from me, and I can give you none. You have no choice but to judge me harshly as all unworthy of your love. So be it. I make no excuse for myself. But I will save you the pain of saying we must part. You know enough to condemn—not enough to forgive. If you knew all, you would find me more worthy of pity than of anger. But neither your pity nor your love can help now. I would not—even if I could—darken your life with my miserable secret. Good-bye, Gerald. Good-bye, for ever."

Grace, coming in ten minutes later, found her brother sitting quite still like one stunned, staring straight into vacancy.

She saw the letter in his hand, and guessed its

meaning. Her cheek flushed, her soft voice quivered with anger.

"The cruel, faithless——"

But he awoke, as it were, with a start at the first sound, and checked her with a motion of his hand even while the tears of self-pity welled into his eyes.

"Don't, Grace," he said softly, "for my sake. I love her still—God help me. I shall always love her."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALL-SEEING EYES

"If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennell."

GERALD accepted his fate in silence. The thought of Dorothy's great wealth, though he would not own it even to himself, galled his pride and helped to hold him back from any effort at reconciliation. He knew her well enough to know that her letter was final. Yet, strange as it may seem, he felt no anger. Some baffling, horrible mystery had interposed between them. He trusted and loved her still, even in the midst of his despair.

Grace, on the contrary, was full of bitter resentment towards her former friend. Her anger was intensified by the daily sight of her brother's suffering. When she learned from Jenny that Wilson still visited—though more rarely—at Rippleton, her scorn passed all bounds. She broke with Jenny for venturing to hint a word of pity or excuse. In her nature, so sweet, so gentle, so full of kindliness, it was only wounded love alone that could waken such wrath.

This fierce unwonted intruder harassed her gentle heart. The quiet tenor of her life was broken. The long day and the restless night were weighted for her, as for her brother, with dull misery.

Worst of all she felt that Gerald's confidence if not his love, that first treasure of her lonely life, was slipping away from her. Brother and sister knew the other's thought of Dorothy, and in their secret hearts resented it. By tacit consent they never spoke upon the subject. In outward seeming their affection was as great, nay greater than before. But both felt that the loving confidence which had survived from their childhood was wanting, and this secret trouble which lay between them was forcing their lives apart.

So a fortnight drifted by—the dreariest of their lives. They were sitting together, after a pretence of dinner, one evening. The conversation between them had flickered and died away.

Gerald lay back in his chair in gloomy reverie, while hopeless love ached at his heart.

Grace made pretence to read, but now and again over her book's top stole a swift, pitiful look at her brother.

He caught one of those wistful glances, and it pierced through the armour of his selfish sorrow.

A moment afterwards he touched her book with his hand to call her attention.

"Grace," he said, "this will never do. We must not mope ourselves to death. I have got a box for the Haymarket to-night. I got it a week ago, but

had forgotten all about it. 'Hamlet' is on—Bushe's 'Hamlet'—the best on the stage. Will you come?"

The old boyish affection was in his voice. Her face grew radiant with delight.

"All right," he said, answering the look, "get ready as quickly as you can."

In twenty minutes they were in a hansom on their way to the theatre.

At the far side of Trafalgar Square, Grace gave a little start of annoyance.

"What is it?" said Gerald.

"Oh! nothing."

"You have forgotten something?"

"Nothing of any consequence; only my glasses."

"*Only* your glasses! only your ears. Driver," he went on—when the little door in the roof of the hansom opened to his tap—"go back to Craven Street for a moment."

"Yessir."

Little Gerald guessed what that return meant for him and her, and for their whole future life.

In spite of the delay they were in good time. There was a brilliantly-dressed throng at the door as they went in. Just as they passed the entrance Gerald noticed that Grace drew her dress aside with a little sudden shiver as if she had come near touching a snake, but he did not notice the two figures that at that moment slipped past them on their way to the boxes.

Presently they found themselves in a box close to the stage and absorbed in the play.

Gerald's praise had been no more than just. The greatest living "Hamlet" was on the stage: the "Hamlet" of Shakespeare's own conception—mystic, passionate, profound. The actor had a voice of marvellous softness and clearness, the greatest of all gifts when the words are Shakespeare's, where every line, every word, is replete with music, power, and beauty. The faintest whisper came to the unstrained ear of the audience distinct as it left the lips of the actor. Not the rustle of a consonant, not the inflection of a vowel was lost. Hamlet himself lived and spoke for them on the stage. In the soliloquies, the masterpieces of human thought and language, there were laid bare with appreciative power the wondrous workings of that great soul in which passion was dissipated in poetry and resolution chilled by philosophy. The Hamlet of the great actor's conception was neither mad nor sane as the words are conventionally used. Now a sudden gust of passion carries him across the dividing line, faint as the shading of the rainbow when one hue melts into another. Then his strong, clear intellect rescues him from the threatening madness. He "puts his antic disposition on" rather as an excuse to himself for his own extravagance than as a protection against the king's suspecting.

Infinite tenderness too was in the conception of the character. The scene with Ophelia touched the very

virtue of compassion in Gerald's soul. The pathos of the play was for him intensified by self-pity. The lovers' fate seemed so like his own; a grim secret breaking the bonds of their happy love and forcing their lives apart. Yet with his pity there mingled something like anger for Hamlet's weakness. If Dorothy had been but true to him, with the tender, trusting love of Ophelia, no power of heaven or hell—he told his heart—could have divided them.

With this he dropped into the old musing of his wasted love and hopeless life, and in the numbing pressure of his own grief the mimic sorrows of the stage were forgotten.

Every one has noticed how eyes fixed intently on one's face, as by some mesmeric power, will force attention. So it happened now to Gerald. In a box almost directly opposite, but one place further from the stage than his own, there were a man and a woman watching him keenly. The man was handsome, and quietly dressed; the lady was handsome, and fashionably—even too fashionably—dressed. Her hair was obtrusively golden, and the perfect contour of neck and arms were liberally displayed. In her bright hair and on her white bosom diamonds blazed.

The faces seemed familiar to Gerald. Yet he was puzzled for a moment. Then with a fierce throb of anger he knew. The silky beard and moustache were gone, but the man's face was Wilson's, and the woman beside him was the hard-eyed girl who had waited

for him in the park on that evil day when Dorothy first looked on his face.

Grace touched her brother's arm softly. "Don't look so savage, Gerald," she whispered. "The people about will notice. I saw them there from the first, but I hoped you would not see."

For a moment she turned her glasses from the stage where the curtain had just risen on the play scene, to the box opposite. Instantly her manner changed; her whisper thrilled with excitement.

"Listen, Gerald, listen! they are talking of you and Dorothy."

Then like a flash there came to Gerald a sudden recollection of his sister's wonderful power. The secret of the guilty pair opposite, as they talked there alone in fancied security, was open as day to her all-seeing eyes.

For one moment a strong instinct prompted him to tell his sister to turn her eyes away. But quickly the controlling thought came—here was a God-given chance to learn the truth and save his sweetheart from evil. He sat silent and waited.

"Listen, listen," whispered Grace's voice again eagerly; "turn your face to the stage and listen."

In his pocket was the letter in which the box order had been enclosed—a blank sheet of paper "with compliments" on the top. At his watch-chain hung a pencil-case.

In an instant he was ready. As the words shaped themselves to Grace's watching eyes on the uncon-

scious lips across the theatre, as they reached his ear in her soft whisper, they trickled down from his pencil point on the paper.

"Wilson is speaking now, Gerald. She has been reproaching him for being so much with Dorothy."

Gerald ground his teeth with rage. "Their very words," he whispered back; "give me their very words."

"So you're jealous, you little spitfire! I like you none the worse for that."

"Don't play with me, Arthur. It's not safe."

"Clement, if you please."

"Arthur, I say—Arthur Smithson. It is well to remember sometimes who you are. The whole world will know you if you put me to it."

(Turning his eyes for one moment from the stage across the theatre, Gerald saw that Wilson had grown very pale, and was biting his nether lip furiously. Then Grace's whisper and his pencil went on together again.)

"What devil has got hold of you to-night? Are you mad?"

"It is you who are mad to provoke me. I have borne too long your meanderings with this doll-faced girl. Do you love her? Do you mean to marry her?"

"If you only knew."

"I will know, I tell you, all, all. I'm not one to be played with. You ought to know that. What I did to another for your sake I'd do to you if you played me false."

"D——n it, girl. I have no thought of playing you false. There is a tie between us two stronger than marriage, stronger than love, stronger than death."

"Aye, stronger than death; don't you forget it."

"Have I forgotton it? Have I refused to share my luck with you?"

"But this girl. Why do you go to her? Why do you walk with her? I've watched you there. I saw you were struck with her that first day in the park."

"Struck with her! So I was, in a way you'd hardly fancy."

"There is only one way. You were quivering all over. You could not keep your eyes from her face. You've haunted her ever since."

"For your sake as well as my own, if you only knew."

"There must be an end to it, I tell you. I will give you up alive to no woman."

"There is no reasoning with you when you are in this humour. Listen then, and know what a fool you are making of yourself. What do you think this girl's name is?"

"What do I know? What do I care?"

"Her name is Merlyn."

(Grace's whisper ceased here. Gerald waited.)

From the stage came Hamlet's voice to his ears, in tones of mocking scorn—

The Mousetrap; marry how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is

the Duke's name. His wife Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work. But what of that? Your majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not; let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.

Grace was still silent. Gerald's eyes went up from the stage to the box opposite. He saw that the girl there had grown very pale, her lips were fallen apart, her eyes were staring.

"Listen," whispered Grace warningly. "She is speaking again."

Then instantly the tragedy on the stage, the brilliant applauding audience were forgotten. Gerald saw nothing but the scrap of paper before him. He heard nothing but Grace's clear whisper at his ear.

"Merlyn! You do not mean it, Arthur? You cannot mean it; not the sister of the man I married, the man I——"

"Stop that, I say. The coroner's jury found suicide. That's good enough for us."

"Remember it was you made me marry him."

"Well, what if I did? I thought the young fool's folly would help us to the old rogue's money. It looked a certain thing, but it didn't work. We had a second try for the money, as you know, but that didn't come off either. The third is the charm. I've got my grip fast on the dead miser's gold at last. Sure thing this time."

"How? how? There is some devilment behind this. I see it in your eyes."

"Turn your face to the stage and keep cool, and I will tell you. You look madder than Hamlet there. The people will notice your antics. That girl in the box with Daly—his sister, I suppose—has got her glass on your face for the last ten minutes."

"Go on, I'm listening."

"Well, you know when I chucked myself into the river I hadn't a copper coin to cross myself. Doesn't it strike you that I have been pretty flush of late? Diamonds cost money."

"The man that pulled you out helped you, and his friends."

"Aye, at first, in moderation. After that I helped myself freely. You remember what a rage I was in when it came out in the paper that the big pile of coal-dust where we—where they buried the old miser was simply a mound of pure gold. I was near going over the bridge again at the bare thought of it. Luckily, I didn't. Everything has come right at the end. When Daly introduced me to Miss Merlyn in St. James' Park I was bowled over as if I had met a ghost. Do you wonder now that I was 'struck,' as you call it? But those fits don't hold me long. I thought the thing out during the night, and I called early next morning, and established myself in the lady's confidence and affection as her long-lost brother."

"You did that? You dared to do it?"

"Aye, just. I found your pretty sister-in-law full of sympathy for the poor brother who had been so

harshly treated. I killed you off quietly not to complicate matters—quite a pathetic story of poverty and tender-hearted devotion. You'd hardly know yourself."

"How could you do this thing? How could you dare face the girl with her father's life on your——"

"Stop that, I tell you again. The old miser earned what he got. He threatened to hang the lot of us. Besides, it was Colles finished him. I could not have saved him if I wanted to. But I put my neck in a halter for a share of the money, and I mean to have it in spite of the devil."

"Your story is a lie, Arthur. She'd have known at once. You are not the least like Frederick."

"How was she to know that? She was little more than a baby when you two started on your long honeymoon. I showed her his papers and letters. I knew his life better than he did himself. She had no choice but to believe me, and she did."

"But your mother, her servant, Martha, she would know."

"Aye, she knew right enough, but what could she do? I swore I would throw myself into the Thames again if she peached. She has a horrible suspicion that I was in the job at Sunbury Crescent, when she was coaxed out of the way on pretence of meeting me in the city, the day old Merlyn was done for. She's clean daft with fright. I've promised to repent and levant as soon as it is safe, if she will only stand by me for a little. If she would hold her tongue I swore no harm would be done in the end; if she spoke

she would kill her own son. It was a hard fight in her mind, between her love for the girl and her love for your humble servant; but blood is thicker than water, and I came out on top in the end."

"But there must be hundreds of others who know him?"

"What if there are? To all the world except those two I'm Clement Wilson, no relation whatever to Frederick Merlyn. That's the neatness of the thing. I confessed to my dear sister I had strayed from virtue's path—abandonment, destitution, temptation; all that sort of thing. There was a warrant out, I told her, for my arrest. I frightened the simple soul almost to death. She cried over me for a good hour, swore to save me, to keep my secret from all the world—sweetheart included. Meanwhile she has fed me freely with coin. Only once she gave trouble. She came crying to me for leave to tell Daly; him alone. He would help us both, she said. But I wouldn't hear of it, of course; hinted that things were blacker than she thought—that my life was in danger if I was discovered. She stared at me blankly at first, hardly knowing what I hinted at. Then, as my meaning dawned on her, she went off in a dead faint. Since then there has been a sad falling off in sisterly affection; but the money has come as freely as ever, and that's a balm to my wounded heart. She has been urging me to take half the fortune and leave her. It's mine by right, she says, and I'm forced, of course, to admit that is so."

"Then why not take her at her word? Why not draw stakes and quit? We could do very nicely on half-a-million in 'Frisco or Chicago."

"I'll tell you why. Because I want her parted for good and all from Mr. Gerald Daly before I start. I hate the fellow, and fear him. He saved my life! Aye, as he'd have saved a dog's if he tumbled in the river in my stead. I owe him no thanks for that. I hate him for that cursed good-humoured, condescending, I'm-the-right-sort-of-chap manner of his. I hated him most when I had to bow and smile and sneak to him at first. I took it out afterwards when I got the chance. There was no part of the business I liked better than seeing him writhe when I made my own of the girl before him. I think she has broken with him outright, for she believes a girl with such a bad lot of a brother is not worthy of his lordship; pleasant that, for me. But I must make dead certain before I go. I should never feel safe while there was a chance of those two coming together again. He'd track me to the ends of the earth if he only knew. Curse him! I wish I'd got him now down there where the chaps are fencing, with the foils in our hands and the buttons off. I'd show him then some prettier sword-play than—what's his name—Laertes."

On the stage the last scene of the play was in progress. Steel clashed and flashed as the fencers lunged and parried, while the vast audience held their breath with excitement. Hamlet had just wrenched the unbated and envenomed foil from Laertes' grasp

and turned its point upon his treacherous foe. The end was close at hand.

Gerald touched his sister's arm.

"Come," he said softly, and they slipped quietly away from their box while the last dying speech of Hamlet still held the great audience spell-bound.

At the theatre door Gerald hailed a hansom.

"You won't be frightened to go home alone this once, Grace?"

"Not frightened for myself, Gerald; but you—you will be very careful?"

"There is no danger for *me*, darling."

The confidence in his voice reassured her even while it roused another fear.

"You won't kill him, Gerald?"

"No; but I will drive him out of the country, out of our lives for ever. His punishment I will leave to God, Who has to-night miraculously saved us from his villainy. Don't be nervous, Grace," he went on, for he felt the hand that rested on his arm trembling as they walked a little way down the pavement, "I will be very cautious. I know the devil I have to deal with, and my life is very precious to me now."

He found a driver that he knew, and gave the man double fare and his address.

As he handed Grace into the hansom, she whispered softly and repentantly—

"You were right about poor Dorothy, and I was wrong. Oh, I'm so glad!"

He pressed her hand gratefully for that whisper. The hansom whirled away into the night, and Gerald stood at the theatre door waiting.

Soon the brilliant crowd began to stream past him, the women gorgeous in jewels and bright drapery, with the excitement of the play still lingering on their faces. But Gerald had no eyes for women's beauty, no ear for the whispers that buzzed about him, extolling the genius of the great actor. He waited, calmed by the very intensity of his excitement, vigilant, resolute.

At last, far down the passage he saw the face he waited for. Wilson was talking gaily to his companion as they moved out slowly in the midst of the gay throng, but the woman's face was still troubled and very pale. They passed without seeing him into the street, and Gerald followed. A few yards from the theatre door he touched Wilson sharply on the shoulder.

The other turned with a startled, hunted look in his eyes. But it was only for a moment.

"Well met, Mr. Daly," he cried, with a faint savour of insolence in his tone. "I thought I saw a lady with you in your box. Will you allow me to introduce you to—Mr. Daly: Miss ——"

"It is not needed," said Gerald curtly, "I know you both."

The woman's cheek flamed at his words—the man turned ghastly pale. But before he could speak Gerald went on—

"Send that woman away. I must speak alone with you, Mr. Arthur Smithson."

The man started back as if struck in the face. For a moment he made as if he would have turned and fled. But there was a splendid reserve of audacity in him.

"Mr. Daly," he said, with dignity, "you forget yourself strangely. You presume on the services you have rendered to me. If this is a jest, let me say——"

"It's deadly earnest," retorted Gerald sternly, "and you know it. Enough of this foolery. If you value your own safety, if you value your own life, come with me now. It is your last chance."

Gerald's manner and his own conscious guilt cowed the man. He whispered to his companion as he helped her into a hansom—

"I must see this thing out. The fool has guessed something. In an hour's time I'll be with you."

Then he turned on Gerald a face of concentrated malignity.

"I'm ready," he said shortly.

For a hundred yards the two men walked silently down the street, till they were quite clear of the crowd and bustle round the theatre door. Then Gerald spoke again in stern command.

"This must cease at once."

"What must cease?"

"Your persecution of Miss Merlyn. The vile fraud by which you have made her life miserable."

"By what right do you interfere between us? Has she made complaint to you?"

"Man, I know all, I tell you—all."

"Then you know that Miss Merlyn is my sister, and has herself acknowledged the relationship."

Gerald stopped short, facing him. The street was deserted.

"I know," he said slowly, looking his man squarely in the face, "that you are the foulest liar in the devil's service. I know that you, who have helped in the murder of the father, have dared to claim brotherhood with the daughter."

The shot went straight home. The audacity of the man was killed in him by the shock. He was pale and trembling—a coward confessed. He tried to cry out "It's a lie," but the words stuck in his throat. His tongue refused to obey his brain; only a confused muttering came.

Gerald went on sternly.

"I have proof of what I say, damning proof—without it I could not believe the devil himself capable of such devilry."

The other made a desperate effort to master his terror, but his old assurance was gone; his voice faltered and his words tripped over each other.

"You shall answer for this, Mr. Daly," he stammered. "You speak of proof. Did she—— What proof is possible that——"

"Your own confession. Stop a bit! Every word you spoke to your paramour to-night—is here."

He took the paper from his pocket.

"Shall I read it for you? 'The old miser deserved what he got. He threatened to hang us both. Besides it was Colles finished him, not I.'"

"In the devil's name, how——"

"No matter how. I have here evidence to send you to the gallows, if I choose."

Smithson laughed a jarring little laugh.

"All right," he said; "I put up my hands. What do you mean to do about it? What do you want me to do? Let us walk on," he added nervously, "we are noticed." For a policeman loomed large in the lamplight over the way.

"You must go at once; you must never show your face in this country again. I know I'm wrong to let you go. I ought to hang you. But I would spare her the torture of the exposure."

"If I refuse?"

"The halter."

"What time do you give?"

"Till to-morrow; you must go to-morrow."

"That's sudden. I don't see how I can manage it." He took out his watch and looked at it with an insolent assumption of coolness. "I should get no sleep at all."

"Oh, damn you!" broke out Gerald, fierce passion mastering him at last. "Do you think I care what happens to you? You go to save your neck or stay to be hanged."

"But if I go, what security have I?" Smithson

answered softly, still fiddling with his watch. "You still hold your proofs."

"Aye, and will hold them—to use if you return."

"I'm safe with you, I know. But your spy—whoever it is—knows too. There is some other man——"

"There is no other man."

Smithson's voice was softer than before.

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Daly," he said; "you are very wise and very generous and very brave. You saved my life, for which I am deeply grateful, especially as I have since found life very agreeable indeed. To-night you made some very terrible charge against me; no one knows of this but yourself." Here his hand went quietly to his breast with his watch in it. "I'm a devil rather than a man, you think—did it ever strike you that——"

There was a white gleam in the electric light as he flung up his right hand suddenly from his bosom. From Gerald's brain the warning flashed to ready nerve and muscle. The knife's keen point was at his breast when his strong grasp fell on the assassin's wrist.

The struggle was short, sharp, silent, both men, with teeth set, straining to the uttermost. Smithson was tough and strong; but Gerald's muscles were steel springs.

Suddenly Smithson gave a little, quick cry of pain, and the knife dropped from his nerveless grasp. The point struck the pavement, snapped off like an icicle, and slid away tinkling and glimmering in the electric

light. Smithson groaned piteously; his right arm swung limp by his side, the wrist sprained.

For a moment the two men faced each other, drawing their breath hard.

"Well," said Gerald at last, quietly. The struggle had cooled, not heated, his passion. With a fierce joy he had felt the wrist yield to his savage wrench, exulting in the pain he gave. He had no pity.

"Well," answered Smithson sulkily; "you've won the last trick. I'll go; but how?"

"I leave that to you. Get the ocean between us for your own sake."

"Will China do?"

Gerald nodded.

"All right. There is a steamer, the *Glenavy*, leaves the East India docks to-morrow, bound for Shanghai. I keep myself posted in those things in case of emergencies. I'll not fail."

"If you fail, you hang," said Gerald shortly, turning on his heel, and the other knew he meant it.

Gerald found Grace waiting for him in their sitting-room, where a cheery fire burned. She could not sleep, she said, until she had seen him safe home.

"And now?"

"And now I think it a pity to go to sleep and forget how happy we are. Sit into that chair, Gerald, light your cigar, and let us talk about Dorothy."

From night well into morning they sat and talked with light hearts.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE RIVER CLAIMS ITS VICTIM

"Pulls the poor wretch to muddy death."—SHAKESPEARE.

ARTHUR SMITHSON took better care of himself. When he had got back to his luxurious quarters in the "Savoy," he called up his valet, for latterly he had treated himself to a valet.

"Bindin," he said, "I'm going down to the country for a fortnight. Put my things up; bring me a cup of coffee at seven, and have a hansom with a decent horse, mind, at the door at eight. But first of all tie up this wrist for me. I'm afraid I've strained it a little; a couple of handkerchiefs will do. Soak them in water. There, that's first-rate."

Then he went to bed, and slept the sleep of the callous conscience until his man came with the coffee in the morning. He swore angrily when he stretched his right hand for it. At the least motion, the strained wrist stung like fire.

But he drank his coffee all the same, dressed with Bindin's assistance; ate a hearty breakfast; paid his bill, and was ready, with a good cigar between his

teeth, when his cab dashed into the hotel courtyard at eight.

Bindin stood obsequious on the steps while the portmanteau, hat-box, and bags were piled upon the hansom. Smithson handed him a card with a purely imaginary address in Surrey. "Back in a fortnight or so," he said. "Let me know where you are lodging, and call for letters here and send them on."

Then the cab whirled noiselessly on rubber tyres along the Embankment.

Bindin was a good judge of a horse. In less than an hour the hansom drew up at the South West Indian Dock Basin where the *Glenavy* lay.

Smithson had a brief but satisfactory interview with the bluff Captain Beverly.

"Yes," said the captain. "You can have a berth, Mr. Wilson. Sorry bad news is taking you to Shanghai, but will be glad of your company. Only three other passengers on this voyage. We haul out at one sharp."

His things were comfortably packed in his berth, and he found his way once again to the captain's cabin.

"I can settle for my ticket with you, Captain, I suppose?"

"If you please, Mr. Wilson."

As he put the Captain's receipt in his well-filled pocket-book, a vague thought that he had forgotten something, that had been troubling him all the morning, suddenly took definite shape.

With a chill of dismay he remembered that the last thousand pounds which he had extorted from Dorothy, still lay in notes and gold securely locked up in the mahogany writing-desk in his sitting-room in the "Savoy." But dismay never mastered him long. He looked at his watch; twenty-five past nine; still ample time to get there and back again. He lost none of it. In five minutes he was in a hansom, bowling rapidly back the long stretch of the Commercial Road towards the city.

There was some delay at the "Savoy" getting the key of his room, which had been already engaged. But the chamber-maid's duplicate was found at last. Without waiting for the lift he went up the stairs three at a time, flung open the drawer, and crammed the money in handfuls—one hundred and fifty in notes and eight hundred and fifty in gold—into his pockets.

"A sovereign if you are back within the hour," he said to his cabman, and they went off at a hand-gallop along the Embankment.

But the old proverb, "the more haste the less speed," was again verified. Turning sharp off the Embankment the horse slipped, strained his fetlock in the attempt to save himself, and went dead lame. Fuming with impatience Smithson found himself another cab with a slow horse and a sulky driver. He cursed them both the whole way through the city. His time was running perilously short. But as they turned into the long straight stretch of the

Commercial Road, the driver woke up and sent the horse along at a rattling pace. Watch in hand Smithson drew a long breath of relief. At the rate they went he would be well within his limit.

But his misfortunes are not over yet. As they neared the head of the long road, he noticed that the traffic grew thicker and thicker and their pace slower and slower. Then suddenly they stopped short in the middle of a block. The axle of a great four-horse waggon had snapped under the strain of a heavy load of rails, and the huge, awkward bulk lay athwart the road, completely damming the stream of traffic on either side. There was barely room for a single vehicle to pass. Men were busy shifting the cumbersome rails to widen the passage.

"Drive on," shouted Smithson furiously to the driver, "d—n you, drive on."

The driver made no reply. But a policeman who ruled the tumult with imperturbable calm, came up at once.

"Keep quiet, sir," he said. "In five minutes the way will be clear."

Five minutes. He had still five minutes or more to spare if he drove fast when they got free. One minute—two; three; four; five; how the time crawled by. Twice he was sure his watch had stopped. Then the close-packed traffic began to move; ever so slowly; then at a signal from the raised arm of the policeman it stopped again. Smithson groaned out a curse through his teeth. He would be late—he

would be late. The thought came to him; he must get out and run. He hesitated. It would be a close shave—a very close shave. He cursed again as he thought of that wasted five minutes. If he had started then he would have been in good time. But now it was a forlorn hope—but the only hope. "I'm off, cabby," he shouted, as he pushed the door open and leaped out. He flung the man a sovereign. He had no time or thought for change, and darted and wriggled through the close-packed traffic with its hundreds of jammed wheels like a huge piece of machinery. He forced his way somehow, though sorely hampered by his disabled wrist, through the press. Seeing his eagerness men made what way they could for him. He brushed by wheels and slipped under horses' necks and horses' bellies in his haste. Climbing the barrier of scattered rails he found the throng less close on the off side. Presently he was in open space and started to run. He was wiry and active as a wild cat, and dashed along at a good swinging pace. But the dead weight of the gold in his pockets pulled him back. He could hold up the pocket on the left side and so ease the strain, but on the right side the weight bumped against his thigh as he ran. It was impossible to keep up the pace along the Dock. Under the sheds that ran along the water's edge the ground was cumbered with bales and boxes that threatened to trip him at every stride.

Leaping for a moment on a great wooden box in

the midst of the *débris*, he saw that the *Glenavy* was still in her place. But the white steam was breaking from her in quick, impatient puffs, and the bell was ringing furiously. He put on a last reckless spurt. He was still fifty yards away when the huge vessel quivered from stem to stern with the motion of her screw and began to draw slowly away.

Very slowly the line widened between the wall and her side, but they were a good twelve feet apart when Smithson came up with a rush. Two police in plain clothes tried to stop him, but he dodged under their arms and leaped for it.

The crowd cheered wildly as he leaped. The cheer broke off abruptly. Active and sure of foot he had landed lightly on to the rail of the moving vessel. But he staggered a little with the motion and strove to steady himself. The drag of the weight in his pockets pulled him back. Instinctively his right hand broke out from the bosom of his coat to grasp the brass steering-rod that ran breast high round the ship. A sharp cry came from him as his hand closed on the bar. The agony of his maimed wrist forced his grasp open. For a second he poised, swaying on the narrow foothold, then toppled and went over backwards into the widening channel of muddy water between the vessel and the wall.

The cry "Man overboard" rang out from the vessel, and the engines ceased working in an instant. From the deck and from the wall they watched, ready with ropes to throw the moment he re-appeared.

In vain they waited. The dead weight of the gold held the strangling wretch to the muddy bottom. Only a tiny stream of bubbles, like a string of glass beads, rose through the black, greasy water and vanished as they touched the surface. That was the end.

CHAPTER XXX

MERRY AS A MARRIAGE BELL

"Light so low upon earth,
You send a flash to the sun,
Here is the golden close of love,
All my wooing is done."

TENNYSON.

"WILL you tell her, Grace, or shall I?"

"Don't be a goose, Gerald. She must have it from your own lips, of course. She will love the sound of your voice the better all her life for this good news. Poor Dorothy! how she must have suffered. I hate myself when I think how hard I was to her in my thoughts. I don't deserve to go near her. She ought never to speak to me again now."

"I'll catch the nine train if I look sharp," said Gerald. They had just made pretence of an early breakfast. "I cannot rest until I see her sweet face again. I'm half afraid of my own happiness, it seems too good to last. Was there ever such a sweet face in this world before, Grace?" he asked, with the imbecility of true love.

"Never," Grace assented, and she meant it; which is perhaps the strangest instance of female friendship on record.

All the way to Rippleton joy ran riot in Gerald's veins. As he went down the river walk with the light, long stride of the young athlete, the sunshine on the water, the fresh breath of the morning air on his face, seemed to blend pleasantly with the happiness that glowed triumph in his heart. He was half surprised to find the pretty place unchanged. It seemed years since he was here.

There was a quiver of excitement in his voice, as he asked the maid at the door if her mistress was at home.

"Yes, sir," she answered hesitatingly, a little startled at seeing him. "But——"

"In the drawing-room?"

"Yes, sir."

He turned the handle very softly, and went in. His footstep fell noiselessly on the thick carpet. From the far corner in the shadow he heard an impatient little sigh, a sigh of protest and of pain.

Then, with a voice full of love and pity, he called out, "Dolly."

She leaped up from the couch where she lay. For a moment she stood bewildered. Then her whole face changed. Her pale cheeks flushed rosy-red, and the glow of love and welcome kindled in her eyes when he caught her passionately in his arms.

"So you have come to me, Gerald?" she said, as she gently put away his arms. "I'm glad you are come, though it can only be to say 'Good-bye.' I was longing to see you just once. Now the parting will be harder than ever to bear."

"We will never part again, my darling."

In his eyes she read joy, and confiding, protecting love.

"Oh! Gerald," she cried out, answering his look, "what has happened? You have some good news to tell?"

For answer he caught her again in his arms and held her tight.

"My darling, how you must have suffered with no one to help you in your trouble. But I never doubted you, Dolly—never once."

"You know then that man is my brother. But oh! Gerald, you don't know—you cannot know the kind of man he is."

He tried to tell her what he did know, but she went on impetuously, easing her heart of the long strain of that torturing secret.

"He is still a bar, Gerald, always a bar between us. You must not share the disgrace he has brought on me. Don't ask me to tell you what I know of him—what his own lips have told me."

"I know more of him than you do, Dolly," he broke in at last. "He is a devil incarnate. But he is not your brother, and he will never trouble you again."

*

"Oh! Gerald," she whispered tremblingly, "can this be true?"

"As true as God is in Heaven, my darling."

She would have fainted then, but his strong arm round her waist sustained her soul and body. His kisses revived her as the soft rain revives the drooping flower. Presently her first fearful joy was soothed to calm delight, and that one bright hour of their meeting repaid her for the long, suffering purgatory she had endured. So swiftly is the darkness forgotten in the sunlight.

Next day came Grace, shy and shame-faced. But Dorothy would not hear of penitence.

"You were quite right, my dear," she said, "I would have hated any one that made him miserable. But it is nice to know, now that it is all over, that he *was* so miserable at the thought of losing me."

Then they settled down for a little while to the old pleasant life at Rippleton. Miss Jenny was there almost daily, carrying the Honble. George in her train like a pleasure-boat towing a man-of-war. Their time was spent for the most part on the lawn or on the river, and a fortnight went by in the sunshine like a day; and the women were contented and the men were impatient.

"When, Dorothy, when?" Gerald entreated, as they sat alone in the little flower-embowered summer house facing the water, "when will you make me happy?"

"Are you so very miserable now?" she answered

coyly, nestling closer to him, and then the conversation was broken off for a while.

"I am the happiest of men, but much would have more. I want you all my own. My darling, I cannot wait for ever."

"Is a month for ever?"

"Yes, when I am waiting and longing for you. Besides you have a duty to perform. You are an Irish landlady, Dorothy, and you must not be an absentee. Yesterday the Court declared you the purchaser of Loughile. The people are longing to see you. Loughile is the loveliest spot, and September the loveliest month of the year in Ireland. We could spend half our honeymoon there. You will just love the old place, I know, for its own sake and mine."

But she put him by with evasions and tempted him to digressions, and so nothing was settled when Jenny's laughing voice was heard calling them to tea and tennis on the lawn.

But that evening Miss Jenny herself took the question in hand and settled it right away. The men were gone to Westminster. The girls were "busy" in the drawing-room. Cut strings, brown paper, and rich stuffs littered the floor.

Jenny was adding to the litter, caressing the lustrous silks with her dainty finger tips. She loved Grand Duchess costumes of rich brocades, in which she looked more than ever like a dainty doll.

Dorothy, leaning back in her chair, was dreaming the vague sweet dreams of maidenhood.

> "Standing with reluctant feet,
> Where the brook and river meet,
> Womanhood and childhood fleet.
> Gazing with a timid glance
> On the brooklet's swift advance,
> On the river's broad expanse."

"Well," said Jenny, suddenly and sharply, and Dorothy woke up with a start. "Well, when is it to be?"

"What is to be?" asked Dorothy, with a flickering blush.

"It! It! Don't be silly, Dorothy, you were thinking of it this minute; when is it to be?"

"We have not quite made up our minds. Gerald wants the 14th of August, but I——"

"You would like it earlier—you needn't blush, my dear. Remember it's a girl you are talking to. Well, I suppose the 14th is settled. It's rather a bother. I'll have to get married myself sooner than I meant to, for I want you as my bridesmaid."

"And I want you."

"Then we'll toss, my dear. That's what Gilbert advises, you know, in social emergencies."

"Do be serious, Jenny, if you can. I wonder you make a jest of getting married. I just shiver all over when I think of it."

"Then you must enjoy your little tremble or you would not think of it so often. Well, now I'll be serious, and make a fair bargain with you. We'll

be married together on the 14th, and Grace will be bridesmaid to both." Then she put the little restive curls back from Dorothy's ear and whispered.

Dorothy flushed like a transparent vase into which the red wine is poured, and she leaped indignantly from her seat.

"Oh! how can you, Jenny?" she cried. "You should be whipped to think such things, much less to say them."

"I only whispered what you were thinking of a moment ago. Well then, there, I'll be a good girl, and won't tease any more, not one little word until ——"

"Until what?" asked a man's voice, and Gerald, followed by Towers, stepped into the room through the French window. "House up," the latter explained laconically.

Dorothy, the innocent, blushed guiltily, but saucy Jenny, no way disconcerted, answered demurely—

"We were talking like innocent children of the happy days when we nursed dolls together, and wishing they might come again, weren't we, Dorothy?"

But Dorothy bent with a red face over a poplin pattern and did not answer.

"Are these things what you girls call a trousseau?" said Towers, indicating the litter on the carpet with grave bewilderment; "I never could exactly make out what you meant by it. I know what a dress is right enough, and a petti——"

Jenny raised a warning finger.

"But the other things are beyond me. I had to bring a cousin over to see the trousseau of a royal duchess, and she said it was simply too lovely for words, but she wouldn't let me have a peep, which was hard on a fellow, you know."

"Your education has been shamefully neglected," said Jenny decisively. "Dorothy's trousseau is in the next room. Come along, you and Gerald, and I'll do the honours."

This was too much for Dorothy. "Jenny," she cried, "I do believe you have gone crazy," and she caught her by the shoulders and shook her like a naughty child down amongst the silken cushions of a deep chair, where she lay laughing and panting, her bright eyes running over with fun and mischief; looking, George Towers thought, intolerably bewitching.

"Never mind, George," she said, when she caught her breath again, "you'll know soon enough. I want to talk seriously now; listen, you two boys. Dorothy is anxious to be married as soon as possible. Hold her, somebody. You know you told me so, Dorothy. Well, simply to oblige her, I have consented to hasten our wedding, so on the 14th of August you will both be made happier than either of you deserve. No! George, I tell you; no, it's not proper before people—don't you see you are shocking that innocent child there, who doesn't know what a kiss means? You mustn't break in

upon business in that headlong fashion. We are all to be married together; I mean two by two, of course. Grace will do double duty as bridesmaid."

"But what about best man?" said Gerald. "George, I counted on you."

"And I on you."

"Why not Pierce Burton?" said Grace very quietly. She had come into the room just after the men, and had sat silently watching the conversation. "He would be delighted."

"There is no one I would like better, Grace," said Gerald. "But I fear he could not spare the time; he is studying for his final examination, and means to take a good place."

"He has passed," said Grace, a little shyly. "He passed yesterday—first."

"I'm so glad; but how did you hear, Grace?"

"I had a telegram. You see, I ——"

Jenny whistled clear and shrill as an April blackbird, and in an instant Grace was re-absorbed in her book.

But Jenny, the irrepressible, clapped her hands delightedly. "Then it's all settled. Is he good-looking, Grace?" she went on, maliciously pulling down the book that the other might look at her lips. "I hope he is not too good-looking, for George's sake."

It was a very quiet wedding in the early morning It might have been noticed—if there was any one

there to notice it—that the bridesmaid and best man were shyer than their principals.

Poor Grace felt very lonely when she went back to the hotel alone, after the parting at the railway station. She was to return to Loughile under Martha's escort to make all ready for their home-coming. But even the thought of home, of the pleasant scenes of childhood and girlhood, which she had never hoped to visit again, could not cheer her. There was a vague trouble in her gentle heart, for which she could not find a name.

But she found on her table when she got back a pretty bound volume of Tennyson, which was not there when she left. It had a white moss-rose bud for marker, and opened at the "Sonnet to a Bridesmaid," with the last line understroked.

> "Oh! Bridesmaid, ere the happy knot was tied,
> Your eyes so wept that they could hardly see.
> Thy sister smiled and said, No tears for me,
> A happy bridesmaid makes a happy bride.
> And then the couple standing side by side,
> Love lighted down beside them full of glee,
> And over his left shoulder laughed at thee.
> Oh! happy bridesmaid, make a happy bride."

Grace blushed as she read, but she was no longer lonely.

THE END

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